

AN EXAMINATION OF THE BACKGROUND

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The debate between Eunomius, the Arian (Anomoian) bishop of Cyzicus (+ ca 395) and Gregory, orthodox bishop of Nyssa (ca 330-ca 395) has a great deal of contemporary relevance. On the one hand, the question of Christ's full divinity, which Eunomius rejected and Gregory acknowledged, is still the central point in much contemporary Christological debate. On the other hand, the intellectual projects of Eunomius and Gregory raise basic methodological issues to be faced in contemporary attempts to indigenize Christianity and to make it relevant to Secular or "outside" philosophy. Both points will become clearer in the body of this paper.

Two basic interpretative points need to be clarified from the outset - the meaning of the term 'philosophia' in hellenistic and Christian thought, and the basic assumption of the 'technologia' of sophisticated rhetoric used by both Gregory and Eunomius.

'Philosophia', literally, befriending wisdom, meant something quite different to the ancients from what it means in the context of the modern university. Philosophy was no intellectual pursuit, but the search of love (eros) for wisdom or the higher good. It meant primarily a way of life in which one renounces lesser loves like wealth, power and glory, and disciplines oneself to seek that which is unqualifiably good and true. This is usually done in the communion of a small group of disciples led by a teacher or a guru who has already advanced enough in this disciplined way of life to be able to lead other along ~~the~~ ~~para~~ path.

The intellectual discussion is ancillary to the way of life in true philosophy. That discussion can help in shedding wrong ideas, but can never lead to discovery of ultimate truth. This latter

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come only through the disciplined life. How difficult it is for the professor as well as student in the modern university, to realize what the black 'academic' gown which scholars (as well as lawyers and priests) wear today, signified in its original context : It is still called the 'academic' gown because it was the uniform worn by student and teacher alike in Plato's academy. It was actually a shroud worn by the corpse on its way to the burial ground. It stood for renunciation of the pleasures and gratifications of the body - a sort of acceptance of the death of the body ahead of time. It meant good-bye to the feverish quest for money and power, for popularity and fame, for comfort and affluence, for tenure and promotion, for 'reviewers' acclaim and best-seller markets, for the pleasures of middle class living.

To this kind of philosophy as renunciation of worldly pleasures, stands in stark contrast the sophistic technology of rhetorical discourse, which had developed enormously in the fourth century. Technology today means the systematic treatment of techne or the art of making things - the logia (discourse) about techne (art or way of doing something). But in ancient hellenism, the technologos was the technos of the logos, the artisan of using words, the expert in rhetoric, the one who knows about prosody and metre, about sophistic arguments and debating techniques, about persuasion and perhaps, demagogy. The technologos pretended to be wise, or showed himself as wise (sophos). Pythagoras did not want to be called sophos, but probably coined the name philosophos<sup>1</sup> as an alternative, regarding God alone as truly wise, and the philosopher as a friend of God.

The concept of philosophy as love of the higher good came to be very much corrupted in post-Pythagorean Pagan development until 4th century Christians made philosophia once again synonymous with the ascetic life, particularly monastic life.

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1. Diogenes Laertius tells us that Philosophian de prōkos ōnomase Puthagoras kai heanton philosophon en Sikuōni dialegomenos Leonti toi sikuonion turanno e Philiasion katha phesin Herakleides ho pontikos methena gar einai sophon all he Theon. (Prooem 12)

Eunomius was more of a sophist and a rhetorician than a Philosophos in the Pythagorean sense. Gregory on the other hand was one who sought philosophy in the later Christian sense,<sup>2</sup> as an ascetic way of life. But he has shown also prowess and talent in using technologia or rhetoric and sophistry in the less honorable sense, to win a point in debate.

The debate between Gregory of Nyssa and Eunomius takes place within a milieu where the Platonic-Pythagorean tradition of serious life-oriented philosophy co-existed with the more exhibitionistic tradition of sophistic rhetoric. Both Gregory and Eunomius used all the tricks of rhetoric in their debate. At the point of using rhetorical tricks Gregory was not much ~~nebbier~~ than Eunomius. In the pursuit of philosophia however Eunomius and Gregory followed two different paths, with two different starting points and two different methods as we shall make clear in the conclusion.

Our judgment today in the Eunomus - Gregory debate cannot be on the basis of whose arguments are more logically water-tight or more fallacious. Christians especially will have to choose today between the different starting points the different objectives, and the different methods that the two debaters used.

#### THE NATURE OF THE PLATONIC TRADITION

Precisely because Platonism had a higher notion of the task of philosophy, it becomes difficult for the modern university, a daughter of the European Enlightenment, to come to real terms with Platonic philosophy. Mistaking philosophy to be the effort to articulate knowledge precisely and clearly, the European academy, today a universal institution, mis-understands Platonism as "idealism", "world of ideas", and so on.

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- 2 Clement of Alexandria (2nd cent) spoke of the ascetical practice of philosophy (philosophian askein, stromatis I) and John Chrysostom (4th century) spoke about the zeal for the philosophy of the monks (ten ton monachon philosophian zelosai, Homily 55 in Math.p 356)

In Plato's academy two names were highly revered - those of Pythagoras and Socrates. Socrates was more vividly remembered, since Plato and many of his interlocutors had personally known Socrates before his dying. Pythagoras lived more distantly in the past. He left so little of his writing to posterity, whereas all of Socrates' teaching was remembered at first hand by the great master Plato himself. And yet Pythagoras and Socrates had both contributed enormously to the development of Platonic tradition. And both were regarded as basically religious teachers, teachers of a way of life and worship, not as mere professors of logic and rhetoric.

It is this religious aspect of the Platonic tradition that modern university studies of Plato most ignores or marginalizes. Take the great western thinker Bertrand Russell as an example. Russell in fact thought Plato to be more like himself - a non-religious academic philosopher. He blames Porphyry, the Syrian disciple and biographer of Plotinus, for making Platonism religious. In fact Lord Russell, a late rationalist, has little use for Plotinus himself, and blames him for mis-understanding Plato, in taking Plato's "theory of ideas, the mystical doctrines of the Phaedo and Book VI of the Republic, and the discussion of love in the Symposium"<sup>3</sup> as making up the whole of Plato. Lord Russell takes a distinctly greater interest in Plato's political ideas, in his definitions of particular virtues, and his discussion of the pleasures of mathematics. Using outmoded and anachronistic categories Russell accuses Porphyry of being more Pythagorean than Platonic, and as more 'Super-naturalist' than Plotinus. Russell's Summary of Plotinus shows clearly how difficult it is for a post-Enlightenment European rationalist, or for a modern philosopher trained in that tradition to come to terms with the religious element in Plato and Plotinus.

#### PLATO'S SOCRATES AS A RELIGIOUS GENIUS

According to A.E. Taylor, Plato wrote his Symposium "plainly to call our attention to a marked feature in the character of Socrates:  
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Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy, Simon and Schuster, New York 1945, p. 287 ff



He is at heart a mystic and there is something other-worldly' about him".<sup>4</sup> Aristodemus tells us the story of Socrates going into "standing rapture" for a whole day and a night.<sup>5</sup>

But that is possibly another mis-understanding to regard Socrates' 'mystical' rapture as the source of his wisdom and discernment, and therefore to seek that rapture as a means of knowing the ultimate.

No, for Plato's Socrates, what matters is not the rapture, but the teaching and discipline into which one is initiated and in which one grows. Socrates' Guru was Diotima, the Priestess of Mantea. Diotima's speech in the Symposium, reported by Socrates, according to Taylor, is unique in pre-Plotinian Greek literature.<sup>6</sup> Taylor sees Diotima's description of love or eros ascending to the highest good as bearing close resemblance to St. John of the Cross' description of the journey of the soul. W. Hamilton, in his introduction to the Penguin English translation of the Symposium, says about the Diotima speech:

"Diotima describes it in terms borrowed from the mysteries, partly no doubt, because it is a gradual progress comparable to the stages of an initiation, and partly because the final vision is a religious rather than an intellectual experience, and like the culminating revelation of mystery religion, is not to be described or communicated".<sup>7</sup>

Here is another of the problems of modern university studies, which seem to assume that something never could have existed or happened which has not been written about. Literature is a very unreliable guide to the past, as every archaeologist knows. Neither Plato's Socrates nor Plotinus would speak or write extensively about the secret teaching about religious discipline and mystical

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4. A.E. Taylor, Plato, The Man and His Work, University Paperbacks, Methuen, London, 1926/1960. p.211.

5. Symposium 174 ff

6. A.E.Taylor, Plato p. 225

7. Plato, The Symposium. Eng. Tr. W. Hamilton, The Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1951/1959 p. 24.

experience. The error of the modern academic student is to make literary silence a testimony for the non-existence of such religious discipline and experience.

And yet, Plato tells us enough to give us a glimpse of that discipline and teaching of Diotima of Mantinea, which can be taken to be the centre of Plato's own teaching in the Academy.

Love is the secret - love as eros, as desire and craving for fulfilment. It can be directed to any of three levels: pleasure, money, power, physical prowess at the lowest level, above that the second level, where love is directed to knowledge and wisdom; and at the third and highest level, love of the supremely, totally and absolutely good. As the soul ascends the ladder of the mysteries of love, at the end of her ascent, there is revealed to love (not to knowledge):

"a beauty whose nature is marvellous indeed, the final goal, O Socrates, of all her previous efforts. This beauty is first of all eternal, it neither comes into being nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes; next, it is not beautiful in part and ugly in part, nor beautiful ~~at~~ one time and ugly at another another, nor beautiful in this relation and ugly in that ... She will see it as absolute, existing alone with itself, unique eternal, and all other beautiful things as partaking of it, yet in such a manner that, while they come into being and pass away, it neither undergoes any increase or diminution nor suffers any change".<sup>8</sup>

Diotima, says Plato, advised Socrates to stay all one's life in this region of the "contemplation of all beauty. This contemplation, however, by no means is a purely intellectual one. Ardent and passionate, it entails a secret discipline of trainingt the eros to desire the absolute good. Plato's Socrates makes mention of this secret discipline only in one tantalising sentence:

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8 Plato, The Symposium, E.T. cited pp 93 - 94.

"I declare that it is the duty of every man to honour love, and I honour and practice the mysteries of love in an especial degree myself, and recommend the same to other" <sup>9</sup>

Socrates learned these "practices of the mysteries love" from Diotima the priestess, whose religious offices and sacrifices, according to Socrates (and Plato), postponed the plague from hitting Athens for ten years. <sup>10</sup>

Socrates was no intellectual, no rhetorician or academic, like Lycon his accuser or Gorgias or Hippias, or Evenus the Parian, or like a modern university professor. Socrates was of course a great questioner, an exposé of contradictions, a ridiculer of facetious arguments, a logician of the first waters when he wanted to be. But the secret of this life was his "practice of the mysteries of love", and the muse or divinity upon whom he depended for guidance, as he told the Athenians in his famous Apologia:

"You have heard me speak at some times and in some places of a divine element or daemon which comes to me (moi theion ai kai daimonion gignetai). For me this began from my childhood. It is a voice which comes to me, always turning me away from what I am going to do, but never telling me what to do". <sup>11</sup>

'Mysticism' in Greece did not start with Plotinus, nor is it an oriental element. Socrates' capacity to perceive truth, to expose contradictions and to ridicule sham and pretension, came from an "inner life" of the "mysteries of love", of worship, of what came to be called in our hopelessly academic language "theurgic mysticism of the later neo-platonists".

Socrates was a poet of the good, a "poietes of arete," a procreator or creator of the good. And for Plato, this is central - not the doctrines about hyle and idea. Plato's ideal ascribed to Socrates, is to bring forth, or to beget the good, to nurture and train the good; that is the true desire of all souls.

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9. ibid. p. 95

10. ibid p. 79

11. Plato: Apologia Sokratous, 31.C. Eng. TR. present author's .

Our mis-understanding of both Plato and Socrates comes from our academic malformation. The manifest technique which Plato and Socrates used was dialogue and dialectical or Socratic questioning. But we see today how despicably poor mere logical analysis can be in promoting virtue, compared to the Socratic analysis. The difference between the two is that logical analysis presupposes and demands only linguistic consistency as the quality of truth, whereas in the Socratic analysis, there is a prior perception of truth which comes from the "practice of the mysteries of Love" and not merely from the requirements of logic.

It is this practice of the mysteries of love by participation (methexis or metousia) in the ariste psuche of God that both Plato and Socrates advocated. It is the vision of truth, of which one is usually always largely silent, that informs the philosophy of Plato and Socrates, not logic, nor pure thinking. That vision is always born of a discipline of worship, and one speaks little about it, and writes less.

When Plato draws attention to the "standing rapture" of Socrates for a whole day and night, he is pointed to the true secret of all genuine wisdom - the participation, beyond all discursive rationality, in the absolute good.

Not all that Plato taught is in his extant or extinct writings. The Academy inherited this unwritten teaching (agrapha dogmata)<sup>12</sup> of Plato, and embodied it, not just in its class-room exposition, but in the disciplined practice of the mysteries of love in the academy.

The Good was more at the heart of the Academy than the True in an intellectual sense. In fact for them the Good alone was absolutely true. The disciplined pursuit of the Good, rather than satisfactory intellectual explanations of reality as it is constituted the central thrust of the Academy, in the days of Plato as in the days of his successors.

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12. Aristotle frequently refers to these agrapha dogmata of the Academy.

Of course the discourse in the Academy debated fine points of logic whether the geometrical point was a fiction of the geometers or the starting point of a line, the beginning of a flow rather than a minimum of static volume. These discourses were necessary for the shaping of the mind to perceive reality. The central concern, however, was what Plato put in the mouth of Socrates' and his priestess-guru, Diotima, not the discussions about forms or ideas. To know the truth is to choose the good. And to choose the good is to pursue the good through a disciplined life.

Even when academicians succumbed to the temptation of giving priority to intellectual knowledge over the quality of being, the Academy never completely separated the True from the Good and the Adorable. The main concern of the Academy was to grow wings for the soul. "The divine is beauty, wisdom, goodness and the like; and by these the wing of the soul is nourished, and grows apace; but when fed upon evil and foulness and the opposite of good, wastes and falls away".<sup>13</sup>

I think the point is clear. The secular intellectual Plato and Socrates which the modern university studies have invented is pure fiction. The Platonic tradition was through and through religious, and the Academy of Plato was a basically religious movement. It is this religious Plato the Jew (ca 20 B.C to ca 50 A.D) and the Christian Fathers beginning with Clement and Origen (ca 185 A.D to ca 254).

The Platonic Tradition, much of which has left no literary remains, flourished in the time of Eunomius and Gregory, and provided the common intellectual milieu for their debate. It was a living tradition, in which there was no consciousness of any clear distinction either between Platonic and Pythagorean, or between Platonic and Neo-Platonic. It was a rich tradition, in which Christians and Pagans shared much. It was a continuous tradition - a diadoche or succession of teachers maintaining the Platonic

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- Phaedrus: E.T. Irvin Edman, (ed) The Works of Plato, Modern Library, New York, 1928, p. 287.

Tradition and developing it, just as Christian Bishops and Fathers maintained and developed the Christian Apostolic Tradition.

### NeoPlatonic Theurgy

"Neo-platonism," another invention of the modern university, was in basic continuity with the Pythagorean - Platonic tradition inherited by the Academy. Modern interpretations of Neo-Platonism read Plotinus as if this disciple of Ammonius Saccas, was a non-religious philosopher, and as Russell claimed, that it was Porphyry who introduced the religious element into Neo-platonism.

The Enneads of Plotinus, we should not forget, were transcriptions by Porphyry of discourse given without any logical continuity or structure. Plotinus was not a Greek, in the strict sense, but an Egyptian. Those who regard Alexandria as a Greek city with a Greek culture, do not take into account the flow of Egyptian, Syrian and other Asian cultures into it. The Museum of Alexandria absorbed life and thought from as far away as India, beginning at least as early as the first century. The Scribe who took down the notes of the Egyptian Plotinus' lectures was a Syrian, whose original Syriac name was Malchus or Malko (king) of which the name Porphyry (purple-clad) is a Greek adaptation.

Porphyry was perhaps an ex-Christian <sup>14</sup> and certainly an anti-Christian, the author of fifteen books Against the Christians. A native of Tyre, he met Plotinus in 262 A.D., and during the eight years preceding the latter's death in 270 A.D., took down notes from lectures and interviews. It is only through Porphyry's Syrian mind that we have access to the Egyptian mind of Plotinus. And unless our own minds develop something in common with the Egyptian and Syrian minds, we are likely to misunderstand Plotinus as Russell did, and therefore to mis-understand Eunomius.

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14. Socrates, Hist. Eccl.

For example, Porphyry's Peri Tes Ek Logion Philosophias was an exposition of the Greek Oracles which so influenced all writers and thinkers of this period. Augustine <sup>15</sup> calls the book Theologia Philosophias, and quotes from it, mixing admiration and criticism. But he cites also Porphyry's comment on the Appollonian oracle about Christ, that the Jews have a better understanding of God than the Christians have. The Oracles are clearly an anti-Christian, but probably pro-Jewish, pagan work. The pagan gods and goddesses, Apollo and Hecate, condemn Orthodox Christians as deluded, while Hecate at least praises Christ himself as a noble soul.

One has to see Porphyry's perspective as essentially akin to much modern liberal Christianity, in which the dogmas about Christ's divinity and pre-existence are regarded at best as delusions or superstitions - i.e., absurd beliefs which have survived into a rational age. There is no difficulty in thinking that the Arian bishop of Cyzicus was of the same school. Eunomius was an academic philosopher-theologian, who accepted the "theurgic mysticism" of the pagan philosophers of his time as the standard of truth, and tried to fit his Christian belief into that framework - a framework equally acceptable to Jews as to cultivated pagans.

For Porphyry as for Plotinus, life is a sort of preparation for death and for the life beyond death. Philosophy for them also means the practice of virtue rather than the quest for knowledge as such. For both Plotinus and Porphyry, truth and the good are one; doctrine leads to practice; discipline leads to true illumination. Porphyry's early work on the oracles seems a full systematisation of Pythagorean teaching and practice.

In the Enneads the theurgic practices of Plotinus are not made explicit. So modern western scholarship finds him more attractive, and regards him as a pure philosopher, without the taint of religion. But the theurgy that Porphyry writes about is but an embellishment of the sacrificial-cultic practices of the Platonic Tradition, which Plotinus himself practiced.

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15. Augustine, The City of God Bk XIX, ch. xxiii.

What Porphyry seems to have done in his later works like "On the Images of God" (Peri Agalmaton) <sup>16</sup> is to make the worship part of the Platonic Tradition more explicit and more philosophically justified. Peri Agalmaton was probably written before Porphyry became a disciple of Plotinus. Here the idea of God has become more refined, the disdain for Pythagorean 'magical' rites more explicit, a greater confidence evident in the power of reason.

Porphyry seems to have moved from neo-Pythagoreanism to Neoplatonism, after he had left Christianity (if ever he was a Christian). Ammonius Saccas probably influenced him in his younger days, but it was after a bout of Neo-Pythagoreanism that Porphyry came back to Plotinian new-platonism.

Plotinus was the teacher of the aristocracy. His main pupils were professionals like the medical doctors Eustochius and Paulinus, bankers like Serapion, Senators like Orontius, Sabinillus and Rogatian.<sup>17</sup> The teaching of Plotinus was never intended for the masses. Its attraction was for the upper and middle classes, among whom the religiously inclined had only disdain for Christianity. Before Plotinus came on the scene, the upper and middle classes oscillated between various forms of Platonism and Pythagoreanism or Gnosticism adopted for their needs. During the second century, what we today call "Middle Platonism", but which in fact was an always religiously oriented re-interpretation of Pythagoras and Plato, had already become prevalent among the aristocracy. Plutarch and Gaius, Albinus and Apuleus, as well as Atticus, taught a Plato who was able to satisfy the religious needs of the cultured. Plato for these people became the theoretician of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, a legislator for the true and refined religious life.

Plutarch (died Ca 120 A.D.) above all had lifted up the Concept of the one, to hen, as the ultimate reality, as distinct from the multiple or polla. To hen was to on. Hen einai dei to ;

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16. We have a few fragments of Peri Agalmaton in Eusebius Praeparatio Evangelica BK.III. ch. vii,ix,xi,xii, xiii

17. Porphyry, Vita Plotinii : 7 .



ing had to be One. It is this plutarchian reconciliation of  
men and on that Plotinus picked up and made central to his  
teaching.<sup>18</sup>

But the concept of the One who is transcendent and beyond all multiple reality was a common concept in the first and second century Mediterranean culture among the philosophically inclined. One sees it in any Platonist, including Philo of Alexandria. This One is so transcendent, that the world of the many can have contact with it only through an intermediary like Philo's Logos or Plotinus' Nous. The intellectual transcendence of God, which the Jewish and Christian Fathers called the "incomprehensibility of God", was also common coin among the Pagan intellectuals. To get to the One, one has to shed the dragging weight of matter and the multiple. When finally the contact is made, it is not the reasoning mind that sees; it is a new eye opened in the heart; a sudden opening of the soul's eye, as if waking from a dream,<sup>19</sup> that sees the light.

But it was Plutarch again who put the nous above the psyche. Since the One is pure intelligible, the psyche or soul has to rise above both body and soul, to the nous which is far superior to the soul. For Plutarch if the body is the earth, while the soul is ~~xxx~~ related to it like the moon to the earth, only the nous is bright and superior, like the Sun.<sup>20</sup>

Albinus, a disciple of Gaius whom Plotinus read, along with Apuleius, a fellow-disciple of Gaius, had paved the way for Plotinus' final integration with the neo-platonist Trinity of the three hypostases - the One, the nous, and the psyche. Albinus' three hypostases were:

- (a) the first God, who is the first Good, the hyperouranios Theos, the primary Intellect
- (b) the second Intellect, the ouranios nous, the world soul, the Platonic kosmos noetos
- (c) The Soul of the psyche which creates the multiple.<sup>21</sup>

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18. Plutarch: De Ei apud Delphos: xx

19. Philo de Abrahamo 15

20. Plutarch, de Iside et Osiride : L XXVII

21. See R. Arnou, Platonisme in Dict. Theol Cath Vol.12 p 2272 ff

This is not to say that Plotinus simply systematized Gaius, Albinus and Apuleius. We mean to suggest that the idea of a platonic trinity of three hypostases was already current in the literature which Plotinus read and to which Eunomius had access. The Platonic Trinity was the most respectable doctrine in the 4th century Mediterranean Eunomius rather uncritically accepted it, and accommodated it to his Anomoian faith.

Our main point, however, is to draw attention to the basically religious orientation of Middle Platonism, as well as of Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus. All Platonic philosophy was an attempt to counter-act the pressures of the carnal, material body, a lūsis kai periagōgē psuchēs apo sōmatos, a separation of the soul from the body, for homoiōsis Theōi kata to dunaton, for a resemblance or configuration to God according to capacity. This is so in Plutarch and Apuleius as in the less religious Albinus.

We often forget that Numenius,<sup>22</sup> Plotinus and Porphyry were all disciples of both Plato and Pythagoras. The two basic options available outside Christianity and Judaism for second or third century seekers were platonized Pythagoreanism and Gnosticism.

Peripateticism of the Aristotelian school, and Stoicism in their various versions, as well as Epicureanism had lost their organisational strength. Aristotle and the Stoics deeply influenced Plotinus as well as Eunomius. But Neo-Pythagoreanism and Gnosticism were clearly demarcated doctrines of specially organized groups, with their own cults and religious practices.

Neo-Platonism is basically anti-Gnostic and pro-Pythagorean. Pythagoras was more akin to Plato than the wild speculations of Gnosticism. Plotinus, Porphyry tells us, wrote a treatise. Against the Gnostics.<sup>23</sup> This seems to have been directed against Christian Gnostics, who were organised in some sort of "house-churches", and thrived on many books of "revelation." "Plotinus frequently attacked their position at his conferences", Porphyry tells us.

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22. Our access to Numenius is basically through fragments conserved by Proclus or Eusebius.
23. Vita Plotinii: 16, E.T. Stephen Mackenna, Plotinus, The Enneads, 4th Edn. London, 1969, p. 11.

Every attack on Gnosticism by these Platonists was a support, not so much for Orthodox Christianity, as for other pagan groups whose religion was an amalgam of Plato, Pythagoras and the mystery-cults.

"Plotinus, it would seem, set the principles of Pythagoras and of Plato in a clearer light than anyone before him", <sup>24</sup> says L nginus (213 - 273 A.D.), friend and contemporary of both Plotinus and Porphyry himself repeats that Plotinus followed Plato and Pythagoras.

Porphyry also tells us that Plotinus, by following the ways of meditation and discipline, became "God-like and lifting himself often, ... to the first and all-transcendent God" and God appeared to him. The supreme end of Plotinus' life was to become one with the One, and according to Porphyry "four times, during the period I passed with him, he attained this end, by no mere natural fitness, but by the ineffable Act".<sup>25</sup>

Plotinus was a "theurgist", one who sought and served the transcendent God, and was often protected from error by God. For him also philosophy was religion, and religion was philosophy.

It is this neo-Pythagorean, neo-Platonist, theurgic, religious philosophy of the Platonic Tradition that Porphyry and Iamblichus set forth more clearly, and which was the secret religion and faith of Eunomius, the Arian bishop of Cyzicus. The goal of Middle Platonist philosophy was the direct vision of God and the configuration (Homoiosis) to God that would result. Justin Martyr tells us that he took to the study of Plato for that purpose. So did Clement of Alexandria and Origen possibly, as well as the later father of the Church. And why not, perhaps Eunomius too?

Whatever Plotinus taught, we know mainly through Porphyry's neo-Pythagorean arrangement of that material into six groups (enneads) of 9 chapters each. The numbers six and nine have to be traced to neo-Pythagoreanism than to Plotinus himself. But

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24. Cited by Porphyry, Vita Plotinii: 20, E.T. op. cit pp.14-15.

25. ibid : 23

neither Plotinus nor Porphyry or Iamblichus was free from neo-Pythagorean influence. This influence can be seen in later writers like Proclus and the Pseudo-Areopagite, with his nine choirs of angels in the Celestial Hierarchy. In the development of the Tradition (Platonic Tradition) religion and philosophy were always unseparable.

The main difference between the pagans in the Platonic Tradition and the Christians sharing the Platonic Tradition were three:

Pagans in the Platonic  
Tradition.

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(1) The transcendent One is totally One, beyond all duality or multiplicity; there are three initial hypostases, the One, the Nous and the Psuche, but the One does not admit any plurality; the Nous, however is Being, i.e. one-and-many, as Plato's Parmenides said.

(2) The One engenders the Nous by emanation, as the operation (energeia) of the One. The Nous in turn engenders the Psuche by its operation (emanation). And the Psuche engenders the world of multiplicity by its operation. The three are different in status, rank and operations.

Orthodox Christians (Nicean) in the  
Platonic Tradition

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(1) The transcendent One is both One and Three. This Triune One is beyond all multiplicity can provide no analogy for understanding the three in one. There is no room for number of quantity in the Three-in-One, which is infinite. There is not multiple, because three is one.

(2) The Three-in-One creates the world of multiplicity by a process (creation) quite different from the eternal generation of the Second Hypostasis from the First. The Third Hypostasis is not generated by the Second, but proceeds from the First. And the Three-in-One by their joint operation, creates the world of multiplicity out of nothing. And time begins with creation, not before it. The Three together create all things, and there is no difference in status or rank between them. The one ousia of the three has one operation.

Pagans in the Platonic  
Tradition

(2) In a human person, the rationality is the soul, which is eternal, immortal, and of the same genus as the three initial hypostases (One, Nouse and World-soul). The Body is a drag and the human soul has to be freed from it, to be alienated from it and to rise towards the One, by disciplined effort. The Soul is freed and it is in its nature to make this effort and to rise toward, the one, by turning inward, ignoring the world of things, towards the Centre of One's being, and through that centre to the Centre of all centres, to be merged and become one with that Centre, beyond Being. This is done through a secret discipline of worship and ascetic practices of which ~~one~~ speaks or writes very little.

Orthodox Christians (Nicean) in  
the Platonic Tradition.

(3) In a human person, body and soul are both real, both created together by the Tri-une God, in God's image. This image is reflected in the body and the soul. When the soul separates itself from evil, and is surrendered to its creator, it is able to bring the body under control and to use it for creativity of the good. This separation from evil and surrender to God is a synergistic act, where the soul, in its freedom is helped by God. The soul is bound, in prison, and has to be liberation as well as the rising towards God and the free creativity of the good are synergistic acts in which the human being and God act together. The rising in the good is infinite. There is no Term or Final End, but an eternal rising in joy towards the Three-in-One, in the infinite Three-in-One.

Christians affirmed the unity of the Transcendent One just as strongly as the Arians and the Neo-Pythagorean Noe-Platonists. Both Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa strongly affirm the principle "Not Three Gods". Nazianzen's fifth theological oration and Nyssa's fifth theological oration and Nyssa's sermon on "Not Three Gods" leave us in no doubt on this. -----

## The Formation of Eunomius

But Eunomius does not belong to this world of Nicene, Orthodoxy. He belongs intellectually to the Pagan Platonist world, with its theurgy, but Christian by profession, and trying to reconcile the two, in an anhomian context.

Plotinus said nothing of any cultic discipline -- at least nothing explicit. He is silent, even in Porphyry's Version, about any mystical experience or religious rite. The ascent to the One is described in metaphors - rising, responding to voices from on high, becoming present to the Supreme One, moving from the external to the internal, seeing the light, going beyond oneself, polishing the statue, cutting away everything, return to one's origins, return to one's fatherland.

Elevation, introversion, return and vision leading to union - there is for this obviously as method, a technique, a training (Ennead I speaks of a Proficient, a trainee for the Final End; this training is not to add something, but to take something away, something that hinders the ascent of the soul. Ennead I:6:6 speaks about purification through moral discipline, courage and every virtue. In this sixth tractate of the First Ennead, Plotinus speaks about approaching the Holy Celebrations of the Mysteries (I:6:17).

In Plotinus' school, feasts were kept e.g., Plato's feast (vita Plotini 15); papers were read, debates were held (vit. Plot. 18). None of the accounts however mention any religious rites. This is, however, no reason to think that Plotinus was an academic. He was certainly an ascetic, one who fasted and brought his body under subjection, in order to be free from its demand. But of this discipline, the Enneads tell us little.

Porphyry wrote a Life of Pythagoras and a work On Abstaining from Meat. There is little doubt that Porphyry the Syrian practised some Pythagorean disciplines of fasting and abstentions. If Porphyry also took part in mystery cults, he would naturally

rain from disclosing them in his writings, because such secrecy  
is required by the mystery cults. Porphyry died at the beginning  
of the 4th century. Eunomius may have known him through his  
writings only.

Iamblichus who died around 330 was also personally unknown to  
Eunomius, who went to Alexandria around 3350 A.D. to study under  
Aetius. Aetius who was from Antioch on the other hand, probably  
knew Iamblichus, who was just as much Pythagorean as Plotinian,  
and wrote an Introduction to the Doctrines of Pythagoras. In fact  
Iamblichus considered himself a Pythagorean. Aedesius who estab-  
lished the school in Syria was also a Pythagorean and a disciple  
of Iamblichus.

Both Porphyry and Iamblichus belonged to the theurgic Plotinus  
Platonic Tradition, to which Proclus gave fuller expression in the  
Second half of the 5th century. Philosophy is a hierophant of the  
universe - Proclus stated and has to express this in worship.  
This concept is conceivably of Christian origin but has its roots  
also in the Pythagorean and Socratic traditions which ante-date  
Plato and Christianity. According to the Christians also, the  
Eucharist was a sacrifice on behalf of the whole of humanity and  
the whole of creation, as the texts of some Christian liturgies  
remind us.

The Theurgy of the Platonic Tradition has often been interpre-  
ted as the result of an impact of the Oriental religions. But it  
is just as legitimate to conceive it partly as the influence of a  
successful Christian practice of the Eucharist which the pagans  
imitated. Any pagan could see that the Eucharist was the source  
of cohesion and strength for the Christians. The pagans, out of  
a background of the mystery religions and Pythagorean practices,  
developed forms of worship which we now call "theurgy". Even  
Julian the Apostate, in re-opening pagan temples, had in mind  
the formation of a pagan theurgy which would function like the  
Christian eucharistic liturgy.

Theurgy was the technique accessible to the common people, especially for Egyptians and Syrians, to raise their souls towards the One. Iamblichus it was, perhaps more than others, who worked out the role of symbols and symbolic actions in raising the soul towards the One. For Plotinus, the three first hypostases could also be named Ouranos (Bachus), Chronos (Saturn) and Zeus (Jupiter). He saw no conflict between his system made for the aristocrats and the people's religion properly interpreted. But all "things" had to be dialectically used for mounting upward. It was in this tradition, as also in the Aristotelian or Peripatetic tradition that Eunomius had been trained.

Theurgy stayed theoretically in this framework of using things as symbols for ascending towards the One. In practice however the domonic powers were sought after and acquired. Eunomius was less of a symbolist than his contemporary neo-Platonists, but he too practised some form of theurgy, possibly one transformed by Christian practice.<sup>26</sup> Eunomius accepted Christ as Monogenes, but not as homousion with the Father. Christ was begotten or gennetos, unbegotten. Neither was Christ a man like other man, because he was produced. by the unique energeia of the One, which generated nothing but the Son, who is therefore also unique. Eunomius, as bishop (Anomoian) of Cyzicus, must have often presided over the Christian Eucharistic liturgy. Whether he also saw the Christian Eucharist within the model of pagan theurgy we have no way of determining. There need be no doubt that the Anomoian group led by Eunomius was seeking to work out a compromised Christianity that they hoped would be acceptable to pagans and jews alike.

#### Aetius, Eunomius and the Trinity

Platonic or pagan theurgy, refurbished by replacing the dialectic reason of Plato with the non-contradiction logic of Aristotle, within Christian forms and names explains Aetius, and to a large extent Eunomius.

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26. See Contra Eunomium I:54 (GNO I:50 PG 45:265) speaks of Eunomius' ten te aporreton ekeinen mustagogan kai hoia para tou smnow ton musterion hierophantow didaskontai



Aetius was a Coelesyrian, who studied Aristotle's logic under a peripatetician in Alexandria, and also studied Arian theology in Antioch. For him the Aristotelian syllogism alone gave a firm grasp of truth.

Aetius wandered between Alexandria and Antioch, became exposed also to Platonic theurgy, but concentrated, under George of Cappadocia, on Arius and Aristotle. Eunomius is his disciple, less Aristotelian, more sophist, but deeply immersed in the Platonic theurgy. Eunomius learned from Aetius what the latter put down in his work: Theology or the Art of Sophistication. And he uses the technologia (i.e., technique of using discourse) fully in agreement with the principles of the Second Sophistique.

The passage cited by Gregory of Nyssa in Contra Eunomium I:151<sup>27</sup> is a clear exposition of the Trinitarian lore of the Platonic Theurgy that we have been speaking about: "Here is a summary of our whole teaching: "From the highest and Supreme-most Being, and from this, through it, after it, but before all else, a second Being. And a third, but in no way to be put on the same level as the two others, but subordinated to the One as its cause (aitia) and to the second as its birth-giving operation(energeia)".

This is clearly the Trinity of the three initial hypostases of Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus. The three Beings or Ousiai, have each its own operation (energeia) which follows (parepomenon) it, and names coming into being with the operation, according to Eunomius.

Eunomius insists, with the clarity of Aristotle's logic of non-contradiction, that each ousia has its separate energeia, and the energeiae of the three are different from each other; the hypostases, each of which is single and identical only with itself, give birth to different energeiai or operations. The erga or result of these operations we can study, and from these operations we can understand the ousia which produced them. From erga to energeia to ousia we can rise to the being of God, according to Eunomius.

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Nyssa pricks a hole in Eunomius' logic at the outset. If the names of the three Beings come into being along with their energeiai, as Eunomius insists, why doesn't he mention these names, namely Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Why does Eunomius suppress these names and use circumlocutions like "anōtate kai kuriōtate ousia" instead of Father, and more complicated phrases for the Son and the Holy Spirit?

Nyssa regards Eunomius as a crypto-pagan, determined to undermine the faith of the church from within <sup>28</sup>. More explicitly, Nyssa accuses Eunomius of advocating the Jewish doctrine of God (Ioudaikos dogma: 304 D), attributing Godhead only to the Father.

Nyssa's argument about being and existence can easily escape us. For him ousia, i.e., being or is-ness, does not permit degrees. "By what sophia (wisdom or sophistry) does he distinguish between more and less in being?" (To mallon te kai hēton tes ousias). There cannot be more being and less being, because being is a simple predicate. This is particularly so for the Divine being, for Gregory. There is no quantity of more or less in the infinite being.

Neither is there subordination or superordination in the divine nature. Subjection or subordination is only for the creation. If the Son is subject to the Father in Christian faith, it is only the Son as part of creation, not as Creator.

Nyssa's radical refutation of Eunomius does not come from any logical demonstration, though he exposes the logical untenability of many of Eunomius' arguments. The dispute is not between two philosophers and cannot be settled by the arbitration of a third philosopher. The controversy is between two group convictions that of the Church and that of the Anomoeans -

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28. GNO I: 158 ff PG 45:300

"So then the whole fight and word-battle between the Church people (ekklēsiastokoi) and the Anomoians (anomoiai), is about whether the Son and the Holy Spirit are created natures as they say or whether they are uncreated (aktistos phuseis) nature s as the Church has believed" <sup>29</sup>

Clearly both sides are unable to demonstrate logically the createdness or the uncreatedness. Eunomius affirms that there are three initial hypostases or beings, following the neo-Pythagorean neo-Platonist theurgic school to which he really and secretly belongs, while serving as Arian bishop of Cyzicus. Gregory of Nyssa affirms that there is only one uncreated Being:

"The Church's teaching is not to divide the faith among many beings (plēthos ousiōn), but in three personae (prosōpois) and hypostases(hypostasesi), never different in being is-ness (einai), while our opponents posit variety and difference among the beings" <sup>30</sup>

Simplicity and infinitude - (aploun kai apeiron) - that is the divine nature. And if all the first three hypostases are simple and infinite, then one simple and infinite cannot be greater or lesser than another (45:321D). Eunomius obviously regarded the three initial hypostases as simple, but whether he regarded the second and the third as infinite is doubtful. In fact even the simplicity is less perfect as one comes down the scale of Eunomius' three initial hypostases. The Father seems to be more perfectly simple than the Son and the Holy Spirit in whom there seems to be some admixture of compoundness.

Nyssa's final clinching of the argument comes from a direct statement of the faith of the Church, which we summarize thus:

"Being can be ultimately divided into intelligible and sensible (to noēton kai to aisthēton); the intelligible world can be divided again into uncreate and created

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29. GNO I: 217 ff. PG 45:317 A

30. GNO I: 229 PG 45:320 D.

(aktistos kai ktiste). Larger and smaller exist only in the sensible part of the created world, i.e., where there is size and extension. Even in the intelligible part of creation, greater and less would have to be measured by other than size or extension.

"The source-spring of all Good (pantos agathou pēgē), the beginning (archē), the treasure-house (chorēgia), is seen as in the Uncreated Nature. The whole created order is inclined (neneuken) towards this, and subsists by sharing in the First Good of the Supreme Nature, in contact with it and participating in it, by necessity in proportion to the varying (some more, some less) measure of freedom of will each had (kata to autexovsion tēs proaireseōs metalambanontōn). It is the share of this freedom of the will and consequent participation of less and more in the First Good, that becomes the measure of greater and lesser in the created intelligible world. Created intelligible nature stands on the frontier (methorios) between good and evil, capable of either. Degree is then decided by greater removal from evil and further advance in the Good.

"But these distinctions have no place in the Uncreate Intelligible Nature. It does not come to the good by acquisition, nor participates in it by measure. It is itself the fullness of good and the source of good. Any distinction within the Uncreate is not in terms of more and less - not of quantity of good, but only by virtue of the uniqueness of the Three Persons. The three persons are all uncreated, infinite, fullness of good in each".<sup>31</sup>

That is a summary of Gregory's teaching, based on The Church's faith. Nyssa then goes on to refute Eunomius' argument that the Father is 'prior' or 'senior' to the Son, being more ancient, and therefore worthy of greater honour. This of course was the key argument of all Arians: that there was a then when the Son was not; that the Father had first to exist before the Son could be

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31. GNO I. 270 ff. PG 45:333 B-D - summar by present writer.

begotten; therefore that there was a time-interval (diastēma) between the Father and the Son.

Nyssa's argument is clear. First, the universal statement that time belongs to the created order and that there ~~is~~ no time-interval in the Uncreate <sup>32</sup>(45:357 Bff). Second, attributing time-interval within the Creator introduces a logical anomaly. If the Son began at a particular point in time, and if the Father existed for a fixed (finite) period of time before that, the finite age of the Son plus the finite period of ~~time before that,~~ ~~the finite age of~~ the Father's existence before that would give the finite age of the Father, since the sum of two finite numbers has to be finite. This would make the Infinite God finite, which is absurd <sup>33</sup>(45:360 Aff).

#### CONCLUSION

The debate between Gregory of Nyssa and Eunomius, part of which is reflected in Contra Eunomium I, cannot be understood as between a Nicene Platonist and an Aristotelian Gnostic, Gregory of Nyssa of course speaks out of Nicene Orthodoxy, and uses the technologia of the Second Sophistic, just as much as his opponent. But Nyssa has learned all he can from the Platonic Tradition of searching for unity with the One through worship, Nyssa has, however, sifted the prevailing system of pagan philosophy through a religious-dogmatic sieve - the faith in the Triune God and in the historical Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. For Gregory, the faith of the Church was the standard by which all outside knowledge was to be tested and sifted, though in that testing and sifting, or rather after that testing and sifting, the technology of outside logic could be used to the hilt. It is not that logic that yields the truth. But once the truth is firmly grasped on the basis of faith, logic can be fully used to refute error.

Eunomius on the other hand, is no Aristotelian Gnostic. Most likely he agreed with Plotinus and the neo-Platonists as well as with neo-Pythagoreans, in being anti-Gnostic. No doubt Eunomius has much more confidence in the non-contradiction logic of the Aristotelian Syllogism than in the dialectical Socratic logic of Plato. Eunomius' basic effort, however, is to bring the faith of the Church in line with prevailing outside philosophy. He probably hoped, like many today who advocate indigenisation or secularisation of the faith, thereby to win pagans and Jews for the Christian faith. The Cappadocians were the main obstacle in the way. Hence the fury of his personal attack on Basil, which according to Gregory, caused Basil's death. Gregory perhaps because of this belief of his that Basil died because of Eunomius' scurrilous attack, has also been unsparing in his personal attacks on Eunomius.

History has given the verdict in favour of the Cappadocians. But the basic problem is still with us. Do we, like Eunomius, seek to bring the faith to fit the categories of outside knowledge, or can we use the insights of the faith to question some of the assumptions of prevailing outside philosophy. The judgment we have to give today as Christians is a choice between the two projects. Eunomius was prepared to accept the Platonic Tradition as the normative structure within which to accommodate Christianity. Eunomius could do this only by abandoning the two main planks of the Nicene Platform - namely a consubstantial and non-multiple Trinity on the one hand, and a perfectly divine-human Christ on the other with the resurrection of the body. The same temptation faces many Christians today to abandon illogical and unscientific concepts like Trinity, incarnation and bodily resurrection. It was also the temptation of those who in modern times, tried to interpret the gospel in terms of one modern school of western philosophy, be it Existentialism, Phenomenology, Linguistic Analysis or structuralism. History has shown us that Eunomian style projects are fore-doomed to failure and disappearance.

The other style of project, which Gregory of Nyssa undertook in the Fourth Century, has again to be undertaken in our time. Gregory has made a synthesis of the Niceno-Constantinopolitan faith with many elements in the Platonic tradition, thereby making Christian teaching, despite all the logical inconsistencies, the foundation for Byzantine civilisation. Today, for our generation of Christians who have come through modern science and modern philosophy, the task is to re-interpret Christianity in a new global context. Remaining faithful to the Trinitarian-Incarnational foundation, we have again to re-examine the assumptions behind modern thought, question the assumptions which are incompatible with the Trinitarian-Incarnational faith of the Church, and re-formulate the faith as Gregory did in his time - not as Eunomius sought to do.

THE IMPACT OF NEO-PLATONISM  
ON WESTERN CIVILISATION<sup>1</sup>

(Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios)

Christian Neo-platonism scholars like Prof. A. H. Armstrong once held that Plotinus, the Master of what we moderns call Neo-platonism, was totally unaffected by oriental thought.<sup>2</sup> The weight of the evidence is heavily to the contrary. And I have heard that Prof. Armstrong himself is now responding to it though reluctantly. But since Plotinus and Neo-platonism in general have such a pervasive influence on western civilisation and culture, this reluctance on the part of a western scholar to acknowledge obvious cultural debts can be accepted as further evidence of human weakness, observable in India as well as in the west and elsewhere.

Our purpose in this paper is simply to look at Neo-platonism with Indian eyes, to see what is kindred to the "Oriental Spirit" in it, as well as to see how this has affected western civilisation. The treatment here is by no means meant to be exhaustive, but merely as an invitation to further research.

I. Neo-platonism - a quick survey

Neo-platonism is a modern word. Those who followed Plotinus (ca A.D. 205-270) or Proclus (d A.D. 485) would not have thought of such an expression.

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<sup>1</sup>Inaugural address as President of International Society for Neo-Platonic Studies (India)-Hyderabad, 1986.

<sup>2</sup>On the dust-cover of the Loeb edition of Plotinus, translated by A. H. Armstrong, we read, "There is no real trace of oriental influence on his thought." This is not what he said in his article on "Plotinus and India" in the Classical Quarterly XXX (1936) London, reprinted in A. H. Armstrong, Plotinian and Christian Studies, Variorum Reprints, London, 1974.



It should not be forgotten that Proclus was a diadochos—the last Acharya of Plato's academy, and the last major official commentator on Plato's writings. Proclus' Elements of Theology breathe an atmosphere quite different from Plotinus' Enneads, but both trace their teachings back to Plato.

Neo-platonism is a dialectical synthesis of Pythagoreanism Platonism and their subsequent criticism by Aristotle and the Stoics. If Plotinus is somehow regarded as the founder of neo-platonism—and this can be questioned—he was not out to build a new school. More likely Plotinus sought to synthesize the manifold criticisms and counter-criticisms that had confused the Greek scene for generations.

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) had already questioned Plato's key notions, as for example the world of ideas. Then with Alexander's return from India and his death in 323 B.C. there was in Hellenism what could be called creative chaos or turbulent ferment.

On the one hand, Aristotle's disciple Pyrrhon (ca 360–270 B.C.), who had accompanied Alexander to India, returned a master of the rhetorical art, reproducing the early Buddhist Madhyamika dialectic<sup>3</sup> in its Greek form of Skepticism—a far cry in intention from that which it imitated.

A revival of Pythagoreanism (Pythagoras died in 497 B.C.) was a perennial phenomenon in Hellenism and at the time of Plotinus was the greatest rival, in the form of neo-Pythagoreanism, of Neo-platonism.

The Stoics or the people of the Porch, had reacted to all other worldly philosophical speculation, and had settled down to find their meaning and their god within the cosmos itself—not apart from it. They had seen the world, both Greek and Roman, going to pieces, and Zeno (335–263 B.C.) and Diogenes (fl 2nd century B.C.) sought to bring some tough discipline into the dissolute Graeco-Roman society.

To follow the classification of Prof. Plott<sup>4</sup>, the Axial Age of Philosophy was over. There is no more primordial creativity in religion or

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<sup>3</sup>This dialectic was to be further developed in India by Nagarjuna in the first century of our era.

<sup>4</sup>John C. Plott, Global History of Philosophy Vol. III, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1979.

philosophy—only reactions and remodifications. Such is the age of Plotinus—an age of interiority, of seeking unity within, away from the maddening disunity without.

Professor Plott compares the Egyptian Greek Plotinus (ca A.D. 205-270) to the Indian Buddhist Vasubandhu (4th century AD) in an engaging study. We shall concentrate on Plotinus and his effort, and its later modification by Iamblichus and Proclus.

Plotinus takes over much of the synthesis worked out by Numenius (fl ca A.D. 175). Numenius had attempted a survey of the development of "doctrine" since Plato (long before Cardinal Newman in the 19th century tried the same with Christian doctrine). Numenius set down some norms for development faulting the Skeptics like Pyrrho and schismatics like Philo of Larissa. Numenius tried to give also a compendium of views of "famous nations which agree with Plato" among whom he included the "Brahmans."<sup>5</sup>

But Numenius does not bring in Nagarjuna's skepticism as Pyrrho understood its earlier version, but rather the vijnānavāda of the Indian Buddhists, the opposite of the Madhyamika doctrine. In Numenius we see not only the foundations of the new Platonism, but also the striking parallelism between neo-platonic and Indian thought. Numenius builds on the synthesis worked out by Poseidonius the Stoic (fl 51 B.C.), a man of the stature of an Aristotle, and the teacher of Cicero (died 43 B.C.).

Numenius reinstates the religious intent of philosophy which Plato had affirmed and Aristotle obscured. Focusing on Plato's "Second Letter," Numenius would begin with a doctrine of ultimate reality as Triad, a line followed by Plotinus and Proclus.

The first God of Numenius as well as Plotinus and Proclus, corresponds to the Sūnya of Mādhyamika Buddhism and the Nirguna Brahman of the Vedanta. One could also say that Plotinus' "One" is the same as Mahayana Buddhism's Dharmakaya or Tathata.

In Proclus' language, the One (to hen), the First (hē proté), the First Cause of All (aitia proté tōn ontōn), the one first principle (mia arché)<sup>6</sup> is the self-constituted Good (agathon authupostatōn).

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<sup>5</sup>Plott. op. cit. p. 127.

This total identity of Being and the Good in the One in Neo-platonism is what has always attracted me to it. If being and good are inseparable, then so are fact and value, is and ought, science and morality. It is the hiatus between these two which lies at the base of the contemporary malaise in the West as well as in the East.

Equally important to me is Proclus' affirmation of holism in proposition 66, which says:

Panta ta onta pros alléla é hola estin é meré  
é tauta é hetera

"All the existents are to each other either whole or part or same or different."<sup>7</sup>

The following propositions make clear that for Proclus, each part derives its meaning from participation in the whole, and that the whole pre-exists the parts. This affirmation seems so important for our age of ecological crisis.

## II. The Idea of Hierarchy in Neo-platonism

The Numenian-Pythagorean structure of the cosmos, based on Plato's "second letter"<sup>8</sup> and coordinated with the Madhyamika views coming from India, was perfected by Plotinus.

Central to this structure was the perception that the Soul (psuche) of man as syngenous (of the same genus) with the World-Soul. But the world itself emerges at a certain stage in the hierarchy of being, third in rank after the One, or after to hen (Monas in Numenius) which is beyond all being and beyond all form and determination, and after the second entity, which is consciousness or nous (translated "Intellect" by Armstrong and "Intellectual Principle" by Mackenna).

The true being of the world-soul is in the levels above it, i.e. in nous and in the One. Similarly our own souls, which have also a threefold structure, are grounded in the superior levels of Being and nous.

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<sup>6</sup>Proclus, the Elements of Theology, Prop 11, Eng Tr. E. R. Dodds, Second Edn. Oxford, 1963/71, pp. 12-13.

<sup>7</sup>This reminds one of the Madhyamika concept of tetralemma i.e. in all statements, there are four possibilities, (not two as in Aristotlian non-contradiction logic) i.e. affirmation, negation, both affirmation and negation, neither affirmation or negation.

The world-soul (tou pantos psuché) creates the world of differences; our soul has the same form (homoeides), but does not create the world. The world-soul looks to the nous as a whole, whereas our soul looks only to a part of the nous.<sup>9</sup>

But our souls have descended into the world of matter, caught in that formless nothing. Some have descended too far and are more deeply caught. Others retain greater capacity to rise, because they have not gone too far down (IV:3:12). And they keep going from body to body. This Plotinian doctrine of samsara and metempsychosis may be traced back to Pythagoras, but could also find confirmation in the Indian punarjanmavada which had become known in Alexandria by that time.

While Plotinus advances no doctrine of Karma to justify the difference in the plight of the individual souls, he states that these differences are according to a rational principle (kata logon gignesthai IV:3:16). Plotinus speaks of former faults which justify these differences (é oude adikón ek ton prosthen echon tén dikaiosín).

In any case all things are organized logically around a centre (kentron), the circle "receiving light from the centre, and from this another circle, light from light" (IV:3:17).

This dynamic hierarchy of circles is not an authority-structure, but an energy-structure. We should not press the circle analogy too far, for it is a spatial image. Nor should we think in terms of material objects in orbit around a centre, but more in terms of inter-penetrating energy fields.

The soul is not a body, according to Plotinus, nor in a body. It is not present like form in matter either (IV:3:20). There is no analogy, says Plotinus, to describe the relation of the soul to the body (IV:3:21). Not even Plato's famous charioteer and horses would do.

Hierarchy, a concept popularised by Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite, (in his works: The Celestial Hierarchy and The Ecclesial Hierarchy), had nothing to do with layers or pyramids of authority, or

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<sup>8</sup>Also based on Timaeus 39e.

<sup>9</sup>Enneads IV:3:6. Armstrong, pp. 48ff.

our being. To be centred in the nous is to be free and virtuous. Virtue or good is a mode of the nous as it is of being itself.

The unembodied is the free. The soul becomes free when it can move freely without constraint, through nous, towards the good. However it is not a mere shedding of the body. The soul has to move, away from entrapment in matter and in evil, towards the true Being, which is also perfectly One and perfectly Good.

Neo-platonism developed its own disciplines of liberation of the soul from the world of the manifold, and of Ascent towards the Good. It is not the speculation about the nature of reality that constituted the genius of Neo-platonism, but rather this discipline of Liberation and Ascent.

#### IV. Proclus and the Theurgic Revolution

Plotinus is still respectable in the West. Iamblichus and Proclus are not. Plotinus may have believed in praying to the Sun and in magic spells (IV:4:2 40ff). To modern scholars, it is easy to ignore cultic aspects and to treat him as a philosopher. Iamblichus (ca 250 - ca 330) the Syrian, and Proclus are after all too cult-minded and so less worthy of respect to the modern rational, anti-cultic mind.

Yet the Neo-platonism that affected Augustine and the Christian fathers did not come directly from Plotinus alone. The Plotinian discipline was too elitist and a Syrian Malcho (that is Porphyry's real name) armed with the Enneads was unable to prevail in paganism's fight against the Christian faith. With Iamblichus and Proclus, however, Neo-platonism combines with Neo-Pythagoreanism to become a most powerful rival movement for Christianity.

Once Neo-platonism takes on cultic elements, western scholars think, it becomes no longer philosophically respectable. The fact of the matter is that it is in this cultic or theurgic form that neo-platonism had its massive impact on western civilisation. It was the Athenian version of Neo-platonism as developed by Iamblichus and Proclus that Dionysius the Pseudo-areopagite christianized and bequeathed to the western monastic movement and to the medieval western church, and through these to western civilisation.

There are three channels (besides others, I am sure) through which neo-platonism penetrated the Western tradition. First, there was Augustine

of Hippo (354-430) the North African who through Cicero came first to Manicheism and then to neo-platonism. His theology has many more elements that could be traced to Numenius than to Plotinus. He probably knew Iamblichus also, but this is less likely. Augustine is the towering figure of western theological thought, generally unrecognized, thank God, in my own Eastern Christian tradition.

The second channel through which neo-platonism penetrated the west was through the terse and seminal writings of Dionysius the Pseudo-Areopagite (ca A.D. 500). Since he was identified with a first century disciple of St. Paul the Apostle, (i.e. Dionysius, the philosopher of Mt. Areopagus in Athens) his writings came to have high authority in both the Byzantine and the Latin churches. All the leading mediaeval Greek and western theologians wrote commentaries on Dionysius, whose works show the unmistakable influence of Proclus.

The third channel was the writings of Proclus himself. Both Johannes Philoponus of Alexandria and Procopius of Gaza wrote Christian refutations of Proclus. But Proclus' commentaries on Plato and other works were translated into Syriac, Armenian, Arabic and Georgian. The Middle Eastern civilisation paid a lot of attention to Proclus and used him to keep Plato alive. The Elements of Theology was translated into Latin from the Arabic in the 12th century, and was used by Albertus Magnus and Dante. In the European Renaissance, the works of Proclus played a major role. So did they in the development of Arab thought and Islamic philosophy.

The main contribution of Iamblichus and Proclus was to more explicitly integrate the element of worship with neo-platonism, fully within a pagan context. In place of Plotinus' theoria as way of salvation, theurgia or the ritual acts of worshipping the One were stressed as means of liberation.

Usually western scholars are full of scorn for anything that smacks of cult or ritual. Plotinus' magic and prayers to the Sun are bad enough. Here are these Asians bringing in cult and ritual into the realm of the rational! Scholars are often reading back post-enlightenment rationality even into the pre-Socratics!

If however Iamblichus and Proclus had not integrated theoria with theourgia neo-platonism would probably have collapsed completely. The parallels with the "mystery religions" of Egyptian and Iranian origin seem

so obvious. But if anyone assumes that Porphyry and Plotinus had nothing to do with cult and ritual, he would be sadly mistaken. Porphyry wrote On the Philosophy of the Oracles, earlier in his life, but that was before he knew Plotinus, and besides Porphyry is also very much an Asian, being Syrian. There need be little doubt that both Plotinus and Porphyry did practice some form of cult or worship, though they say little about it. The cult itself was a mystery, not to be talked or written about.

The Chaldean Oracles were the liturgical text-book of many a pagan in the fourth and fifth centuries, and possibly well before that. This mysterious work had a great impact on the Christian fathers as well. For Proclus particularly, who regarded Philosophy as a sort of High Priest of the Religions, the cultic-religious element was essential to true philosophy.<sup>11</sup> At this point Iamblichus and Proclus are more Vedic than Vedantic. Where Plotinus asked the human will to discipline itself out of its illusions and rise to the One by mind and will, the Asian Neo-platonists recommended cultic acts, or a theurgic liturgy with mantras and incantations.

Plotinus has his Triad of the One, the Nous, and the All-Soul--but says little about gods as such. Proclus brings in "divine intelligences" (theioi noes), as distinct from "ordinary intelligences" (hoi noes monon).<sup>12</sup> God is One, for Proclus too, and the One is identified also with the Good. His definition of God is "that beyond which nothing is and to which all adhere" (hou gar méden estin epekeina kai hou panta ephietai, Theos touto--proposition 113). And the Good is "that from which are all things and to which all things move" (aph' hou ta panta kai pros ho, touto de tagathon, ibid).

The numerous gods participate in this unity of the One and the Good; but every god is a self-complete henad (pas theos enas estin auto-telés), and is above being (hyperousios), above life (hyperzōos) and above nous (hypernous)--(see props 114 and 115). And every good (except

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<sup>11</sup>See Eusebius: Praeparatio Evangelica 1.V.c. VIII, IX Migne, Patrologia Graeca XXI: 333C. See also Mystery of the Egyptians probably by one of the disciples of Iamblichus.

<sup>12</sup>See Proclus, Elements of Theology Prop. 111.

the One) is participable (methektos), though ineffable (arrheton) and unknowable (agnoston) by secondary beings, but apprehendable by participation, unlike the One (propositions 116, 123).

The gods, finite in number, mediate the energies and operation of the One to the whole universe and leads the whole cosmos to divine perfection (prop 153), through the process of return or epistrophē (prop 31) back to the source. This life of the universe, as a diastole-systole, an expiration-inspiration, as a procession-recession, is a circle without beginning or end, the end being assimilated to the beginning (ta tele pros ton heauton archas homoioutai prop 146). This dynamic life of the universe is what Dionysius later called the hierarchy.

Proclus affirms thus a sort of trinity in unity of the world process—immanence in the Cause (arche) as identity, procession from the Cause (pro-odos) as difference, and reversion (epistrophe) to the Cause as overcoming of difference by identity. Proclus cites Iamblichus as saying that the Cause of identity is the monad, the introducer of procession the diad, and the origin of reversion or recession the triad.<sup>13</sup> The three are inseparable for Plotinus as for Proclus (see Prop 35).

But the epistrophe for us humans, according to Proclus, is through the gods, and hence the rationale for the theurgy.

But the theurgy or mantra one does not write about. It is not for the eyes of the uninitiated. This must be the reason why so little on the subject is available that is written.

It was this theurgic neo-platonism that the Pseudo-Areopagite then bequeathed to the mediaeval western Church and became its most decisive intellectual heritage,<sup>14</sup> through John Scot Eriugena, Chalcidius, Boethius, John Philoponos, Albert the Great, Hugo of St. Victor, even Thomas Aquinas himself. Nicolas of Cusa, and Meister Eckhart were both inspired by neo-platonic writings.

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<sup>13</sup>In Timaeus II:215.5. See E. R. Dodds, tr. Elements of Theology, pp. 220-221.

<sup>14</sup>See H. Koch. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite in Seinen Beziehungen zum Neuplatonismus und Mysterienwesen.



The Arabs and Jews also took to neo-platonism in a big way in the 12th century and subsequent centuries, quite often mistaking the works of Porphyry or Plotinus for those of Plato. Al-Farabi and Ibn-Sinai (Avicenna) are profoundly influenced by neo-platonism. Proclus' work de Causis was taken to be Aristotle's and avidly studied by Christians, Arabs and Jews.

### Conclusion

The 19th century European Enlightenment brought a reaction against Plato and neo-platonism. If Western philosophy up to the European Enlightenment was a footnote to Plato and neo-Platonism, the so-called modern Philosophy of the West is a foiled attempt to break the ties with Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics and to start anew. In that new start, the influence of Plato and the Neo-Platonists is still traceable in Hegel, Kant, Descartes, Husserl, Bergson, Whitehead and many other so-called moderns.

We can no longer go back to the pre-modern, pre-Enlightenment philosophical innocence. But modern philosophy and Enlightenment thought are now at a stage where they need a little encouragement--mostly to confess their failure, so that we can begin again the perennial quest, but with some understanding of the way we have come.

That is the sense in which I stand committed to the International Society for Neo-platonic Studies.

## NEOPLATONISM

I welcome you with deep joy and great warmth to this Eighth International Seminar on Neoplatonism and Indian Thought, on behalf of my colleague Prof. Baine Harris, Eminent Professor of Philosophy at Old Dominion University in the USA, who is the Director of the International Society for Neoplatonism Studies (of which which I am only the President of the Indian Chapter). He is unable to be present, though he was all set to get here when his doctor advised that he was not to travel. His message to the participants will be in your hands.

I welcome you also on behalf of all the co-sponsoring organisations in India: first and foremost the Indian Council of Philosophical Research, which has given us a major grant and done the lion's share of the organising work; the other organisations which have helped us with the funding and facilities: the Manavata Mandir in Hoshiarpur, the All India Association for Christian Higher Education, the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, and the Sarva Dharma Nilaya; the other organisations which have helped in various ways: the Indian Philosophical Congress, the Akhil Bharatiya Darshan Parishad, the International Society for Indian Philosophy, and the Jamia Millia Hamdard. Without all that help this seminar could hardly have taken place. There are so many persons I would like to thank by name in all these organisations, but I fear any such attempt is bound to turn out to be invidious.

I should pay a special tribute to Dr. Girija Vyas, Deputy Minister of Information and Broadcasting, who has from the beginning been a member of the Indian chapter of the International Society for Neoplatonism Studies. She is the honorary chairperson of the Organising Committee and despite the many demands on her time and the fluctuating state of her health, given of herself graciously and generously to the work of organizing the seminar. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Prof. R. Balasubramaniam, the Chairman, Prof. Bhuvan Chandel, the Member-Secretary and Dr. Ranjan K Ghosh, the Director, of the Indian Council of Philosophical Research. They made my work easy in so many ways.

29th December 1992

### Opening Remarks

I may be permitted to make a few comments at the opening of this seminar, which I hope you will discuss some time in the course of this seminar and see if they have any relevance to our topic: Neoplatonism and Indian Thought.

#### 1. GREATER INTERACTION OF CULTURES IN ANTIQUITY

Today we are used to neat compartmentalisations like Indian philosophy, Western philosophy, Chinese philosophy, etc. They have of course some validity for many today, since it helps the division of labour in the academic handling of philosophy. We have often been able, with or without adequate historical justification, to imagine these regional cultures and geographically localized philosophical traditions as developing more or less independently of each other, with only occasional contacts or influences.

Paradoxically, however, in classical antiquity, there were no such watertight barriers between cultures. There were no copyright laws, no passports and visas, and people travelled comparatively freely, though not effortlessly, taking their time, and if the philosopher could survive the rigors of travel, which was often regarded as part of a spiritual discipline, he stayed in the land of arrival and taught, while mastering the system of thought prevailing there.

The earliest library-based examples of this cross-cultural fertilisation of scientific-philosophical-religious (the three were hardly separable those days) reflection centred around the great library of Nineveh in Babylon (sacked in 612 B C) in Asia, and the Museum in Alexandria in North Africa, established in the 3rd century BC and lasting till the 6th century at least.

Alexandria was the home of what we mistakenly regard as a branch of western philosophy, and perhaps less wrongly call Neoplatonism; in fact it is more correct to call it a new Oriental religio-philosophical way of experiencing and articulating Reality with many internal variations, many Asian adaptations with substantial changes in the original Alexandrian creation. Plotinus was no westerner, but an Egyptian from Lycopolis in Egypt; Porphyry was no westerner, but

a hellenized Syrian, and if we believe his story, Plotinus' teacher Ammonius Saccas was no westerner, but an Egyptian from Alexandria who was also an Indophile. Iamblichus was no westerner, but from Chalcis in Coele-Syria. Why call Neoplatonism a Western system, and then try to see if there are any "Oriental" influences to be traced in it?

Both Nineveh and Alexandria were, in Toynbee's picturesque language, cultural "roundabouts" where you could approach from one direction and proceed in a variety of other directions. Toynbee particularly refers in his *A Study of History* (Part IX, Chapter xxx) to two "numeniferous regions" which have generated several world religions: the Oxus-Jaxartes or Sindhu-Ganga Basin, and the Greater Syrian or West Asian or Eastern Mediterranean region. Both these regions were cultural-religious "roundabouts" and were able to give birth to and spread abroad several universal religions: Zoroastrianism, Original Buddhism, Jainism, Mahayana Buddhism, and post-Buddha Hinduism on the one hand, and Judaism, Christianity and Islam on the other. The Tigris-Euphrates basin participated in contacts with both roundabouts, the Central Asian and the West Asian and often served as a link. Alexandria in the 3rd century was certainly no stranger to either Buddhism or Brahmanism.

I just thought it would be good for us to keep these simple facts in mind, when we proceed to discuss the question about who influenced whom and how. Great Religious-philosophical traditions take shape in cultural roundabouts, and not in isolated cultures.

## 2. NEOPLATONISM AS BASICALLY RELIGIOUS-PHILOSOPHICAL

Unlike us children of the European Enlightenment, the ancients never made the distinction between religion and philosophy so watertight as we try to make it. There was no attempt in the pre-modern period at founding a philosophical system without some presuppositions and basic assumptions drawn from some tradition or other, such as we modern sophomores try to do and fail dismally.

Take the Indian tradition. On what rational or non-traditional basis can we establish the doctrines of Karma and Transmigration, so fundamental and so central to Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Indian thought since the 8th century BC? The origins of this Karma-Transmigration framework are not traceable in any tradition, Indian, Pythagorean or Alexandrian.

Similarly in Greece, even Plato inherited a

tradition, which certainly included Pythagoras and all the Pre-Socratics as well as Socrates himself. Attempts have been made to depict Plato as a non-religious philosopher, and Socrates, Plato's Guru and 'Ideal' as a secular prophet. This still prevailing view of Plato and Socrates is easy to disprove, because it is not true. Plato depicts Socrates as an initiated 'Mystic' in the *Symposium*, initiated, presumably into the Orphic Mystery religion, by Diotima, the Priestess of Mantinea. One cannot understand Plotinus without going back to the speech of Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, nor can we understand either Plato or Socrates without reading and re-reading that speech, about which W. Hamilton, in his introduction to Plato's *Symposium* has this to say:

"Diotima describes it in terms borrowed from the mysteries, partly, no doubt, because it is a gradual progress comparable to the stages of an initiation, and partly because the final vision is a religious rather than an intellectual experience, and, like the culminating revelation of a mystery religion, is not to be described or communicated."

(Plato, *The Symposium*, Penguin Classics, 1951/59, p.24)

Permit me to quote just one little passage from that Diotima speech:

"This beauty is first of all eternal, it neither comes into being nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes; it is...absolute, existing alone with itself, unique eternal, and all other beautiful things as partaking of it, yet in such a manner that, while they come into being and pass away, it neither undergoes any increase or diminution nor suffers any change."

(ibid. pp. 93-94)

I need not labour the point further. We children of the European Enlightenment will have to lay down many of our prejudices before we can read Plato or Plotinus with some deeper perception. Religion and Philosophy were never so easily separable, neither in the Indian tradition nor in the Greek or Alexandrian or West Asian traditions. It is true that some tried to separate them in many traditions, but with no great success.

### III. SEMINAR AND DIALOGUE

I wish to make just one other point at this stage. And that is something which rises out of what my

cochairman, Prof. John Mayer said last evening. In this Seminar, our primary purpose is not so much the pure advancing of academic scholarship, but a genuine common search for that wisdom which illuminates and redeems us out of our present darkness. That illumination will come only as we come out of our cultural isolation and seek to learn, from each other, from our own deeper selves, and from the common fount of truth, wisdom, beauty and goodness. We have, in this Seminar also, occasionally to stop purely discursive and critical thinking in which we stand outside the Reality we are trying to understand, and, in Heideggerian terms, to wait in the clearing to hear the Call of Being.

Religion, which produces both dogma and ritual in abundance, can by dogma and ritual obscure Being. But so can Philosophy. It is easy for Philosophy to slip into the critical-discursive and stay there. That is what has happened to most philosophy, in India as well as elsewhere. Both Religion and Philosophy, either separately or together, have acted as divisive forces.

I see a great need in India as well as elsewhere in two different directions; both of which are important.

First intellectuals in general are looking for a way to transcend the demeaning parochialisms of ideologies and religions; they would yearn with all their heart for something which touches their deepest core and gives their lives some significance, in this increasingly hopeless welter of violence and confusion, terror and mindlessness, religious hatred and fanatic politics, to find some meaning for their own personal existence. The "secular" ideology has gone sour for too many people. The religions sometimes scare them with their fanaticism and narrowness.

THE CATALYST IN NEO-PLATONISM AND  
CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM

What Indian Element catalyzed the thought and  
experience of Ammonius Saccas and Plotinus ?

(Dr. Paul Gregorios)

As far as pagan or non-Christian Greek thought is concerned, the 4th century was rather sterile. Byzantine civilisation was an attempt to amalgamate Greek classical, Latin classical, and Christian thought into one composite culture. Constantinople, established by Emperor Constantine in 326 A.D. and completed in 330 A.D., understood itself as the centre of a new great civilization - a Graeco-Roman Christian civilisation.

The new city incorporated the Old Byzantium, including its acropolis and its hippodrome and two theatres. These remained ever in tension with the architecturally splendid Christian Church, the Hagia Sophia. But precisely as this tension was gradually relaxing into mutual accommodation and even incorporation of the pagan into the Christian, a parallel tension had been developing at deeper levels - spiritually at first, but then later more philosophically. This was the real tension that mattered at the heart of Byzantine Christianity.

This latter tension could best be symbolized as that between two saints - a pagan saint like Plotinus and a Christian saint like Antony, both, strangely enough, not Greeks, but Egyptians. Plotinus, born in Lycopolis of Egypt around 205 A.D., had died already in 270 A.D., but his influence was still pervasive in Byzantium in the 4th century. Porphyry, his Syrian disciple, had not only edited Plotinus' Enneads and made them available to pagans who were in search of the higher life of true philosophia. He had written his own treatise On Abstinence, which was a manual of asceticism fundamentally different from that of Anthony as depicted by Athanasius in his Life of St. Antony.

When Antony was born (also in Egypt, around 251 A.D.), Plotinus was already a well-known teacher in Rome for 7 years. But a year before Plotinus died, Antony had left his home and possessions and had begun his spiritual pilgrimage, which lasted throughout the rest of his 105-year life, which ended in 356 A.D.

The Plotinian and the Antonine traditions of spirituality and asceticism were in fruitful tension with each other at the base of Byzantine society in the fourth century. The Plotinian was an aristocratic spirituality. Only one who had been trained in classical philosophy could become a philosopher. The Antonine was, on the other hand, a proletarian spirituality which made few demands on one's intellectual capacities and training. Anthony was a lower middle class farmer's son.

However the spirituality of the common people in the Byzantine Empire in the 4th century emphasized Christ as the Teacher, not as an ascetic. And as pagan scholarship came within the Church, not only in Constantinople, but also in Alexandria in Egypt, there was a demand for a more intellectually respectable interpretation of Christianity.

This too was provided by Egypt, but by that island of Greek culture inside Egypt, namely Alexandria. Here it was not the Plotinian ascetic tradition that was at the centre, but rather the intellectual tradition of Neoplatonism, shorn of its ascetic and theurgic elements, but baptized as Christian theology. The impetus first came from Origen, a true Egyptian transformed by Greek education, a massive genius, meticulous scholar and profound thinker. But Origen was too much of a genius and a thinker to interest the common people. Origen, whether he was a fellow-student with Plotinus, under Ammonius Saccas or not, could never have been simplistic enough for the people, at least not as simplistic enough for the people, at least not as simplistic as his fellow-Alexandrian, the Presbyter Arius (ca 250 - ca 336). Arius was probably Libyan by birth; but as he took up his mission of preaching at the Baucalis Church in Alexandria, his combination of asceticism, neat logic, and consistent theology drew many followers, despite the opposition of his ecclesiastical superior, that Romanizing Greek of Alexandria, Athanasius the Great. While Athanasius turned Antonine in his spirituality and wrote his Vita Antonii, which was so influential in the rise of western monasticism, it was the Presbyter Arius' refined neo-Platonist or Plotinian interpretation of Christianity that appealed to the semi-cultivated Christians of the Empire. Constantine's son Constantius opted for Arius against Athanasius.



Arius represented the cultured pagan's type of Christianity, whereas Athanasius represented the crude spirituality of those who had left the civilised world for desert wildernesses and mountain crags.

And most - the vast majority-of Christian bishops supported Emperor Constantius in this choice, for they too came largely from a semi-cultivated Greek background - at least in Asia Minor and the Danubian provinces. They were Romans of Greek culture, and Arianism became their religion, which was in harmony with the rather "well-filtered" Greek culture that they had imbibed and were patronising as the symbol of the new Christian civilisation, with Christ as Supreme Teacher and the Bishops as subsidiary teachers. Christianity was true paideia and the Bishops were the Paidagogoi, the true teachers.

But the struggle between Alexandria, the city built by Alexander in 330 B.C. and Constantinople, the city built by Constantine in 330 A.D. was part of the intellectual conflict of the time. Alexandria was a strange blend - of Pharaonic African, European Greek, and Asian Jewish thought and culture and spirituality - a magnificent amalgam when it was made in the 4th century BC, but already rotting by the 4th century A.D. It was the city of Plotinus and Philo and Origen - of Greek and Jewish and Christian thought. Constantinople, on the other hand, had its proximity to Persian and Chaldean as well as Greek and Christian sources, but it was never really an intellectual centre.

This paper would focus on two issues:

- (a) What was the critical catalysing component of Alexandrian thought ?
- (b) to what extent has this thought influenced the development of Christian thought ?

The second question is obviously difficult to answer adequately, as we shall soon see. But let us look at the first question first.

The five elements of Alexandrian  
thought and the catalytic sixth element

The text-books will always tell you that Neo-platonism was founded by Plotinus in Alexandria in the first half of the 3rd century. This statement looks to the present writer as somewhat carelessly formulated. It was hardly the intention of Plotinus to found a system of speculative philosophy called neo-platonism. Nor can Plotinus be seen simply as a reviver of Plato's thought in a new form. Plotinus' attempt was certainly not to make Plato fashionable again, after a period when Aristotelianism gained the upper hand in the Eastern Mediterranean.

Of course, Plotinus comments on Plato's writings as if they were Divine Scriptures of some sort. But Plotinus was certainly more than a mere commentator on Plato. Plato's academy had at least three and possibly five stages in its development, but Plotinus was not a leader of any of these stages.<sup>1</sup>

Plotinus, even according to Porphyry, his student and biographer, is metaphysically closer to Aristotle than to Plato. And his teacher, Ammonius Saccas, had shown that Plato and Aristotle were of the same opinion (homodoxia) on many metaphysical points. Philip Merlan, seeking to imitate Plotinus even in style, puts it this way:

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1. The five stages, first under Plato, Speusippus and Xenocrates; the second under Arcesilaus and Lacydes; the third under Carneades (214 - 129 BC) and Clitomachus (2nd cent. BC). The fourth under Philo of Larossa and Charmadas, a fifth established by Antiochus of Ascalon (ca 79 BC). Cicero (106 BC to 43 BC) mentions only the first two (de oratio iii: 18 etc); Sextus Empiricus (Outlines of Pyrrhonism, i:220) mentions the first three, but he mentions a view which holds to the five academies.

"The notion of a Platonizing Aristotle implies a neo-platonizing Aristotle, if Plato, the way Aristotle understood - or misunderstood - him, was a neo-platonizing Plato himself. There is nothing new about a neo-platonizing Aristotle either"2

To put it differently, it is Plotinus who reconciles Plato and Aristotle; or even more accurately, the Platonism which Plotinus inherited was one profoundly influenced by both Aristotle and the Stoics. There was no Greek thought in Alexandria which was purely platonic, purely peripatetic or purely stoic. Plato's thought as corrected by Aristotle and the Stoics, was what one finds, with varying emphases, in a Cicero or a Marcus Aurelius, in an Atticus or an Albinus, in a Carneades or a Philo, and even in an Origen or Plotinus.

But these three Hellenic traditions, i.e. Platonist, Aristotelian, and the Stoic, each of which has learned from the others, did not by themselves form exclusive schools. Whether it is at Athens or at Alexandria, there were other currents that these three schools had to keep in mind - especially the Jewish philosophy of people like Philo, and the Christian philosophy of Clement and Origen. The five traditions thus remained in a boiling cauldron, stimulating and correcting each other, but never able to come to a single consensus accepted by all.

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2. Philip Merlan, From Platonism to  
Neoplatonism 2nd ed. The Hague, 1960. p. 4

This is the situation at the beginning of the 3rd century A.D. especially in Alexandria. Into that boiling cauldron now came a sixth element, which eventually was to start a process of catalysis in all the five traditions. This catalyst, I believe, was Ammonius Saccas, about whom Plotinus could say "This is the one I was looking for" (touton ezetoun). Ammonius died at the age of 82 in 242 A.D. A son of Christian parents, he later reverted to paganism, and not satisfied with any of the five traditions as they were in his time, found relief in what must have been the Indian spiritual tradition, mediated to Ammonius either by Brahmins or by Buddhists who visited Alexandria.<sup>3</sup>

### Who was Ammonius Saccas ?

We have to guess what Ammonius taught, from the writings of his four prominent disciples - Numenius, Longinus, Plotinus and Origen, who certainly do not agree with each other on the most important philosophical points. Theodotus' Scolia of Ammonius and Porphyry's Miscellaneous Questions can hardly be relied upon in their present form. Willy Theiler calls Ammonius "the great shadow".<sup>4</sup>

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3. It is a pity that no Indian scholar with the necessary linguistic, philosophical and spiritual equipment has come forward to do the necessary research on Ammonius Saccas and his contacts with the Indian philosophical-spiritual tradition. H.Crouzel has a good essay: Origene et Plotin eleves d' Ammonios Saccas in Bulletin de Litterature Ecclesiastique 1956, pp 193 ff, and an attempted summary of Ammonius' teaching can be found in Willy Theiler's Forschungen zum Neoplatonismus, Berlin 1966 pp 1-45. See also his Die Vorbereitung des Neuplatonismus, Berlin, 1930.
4. W. Theiler, Plotin und die antike Philosophie in Mus. Helv. 1.1944. p.215.

The only definite thing we have is Porphyry's vita. Porphyry, who came to Plotinus when the latter was 59 and he himself only 30, could not get any details of the personal life of Plotinus, despite 7 years of close association. Among the facts he had gathered the most important is Plotinus' association and satisfaction with the teacher, Ammonius. Under Ammonius, Plotinus was able to study both Zoroastrian teachings and "the system adopted among the Indians".<sup>5</sup>

Porphyry also tells us that three of the disciples of Ammonius, Erennius, Origen and Plotinus made a compact not to disclose any of the doctrines which Ammonius had revealed to them. Plotinus obviously never disclosed directly what he had learned from Persia and India, but wove them into his own system integrally.

Porphyry also quotes Longinus, who obviously regarded Ammonius as a Peripatetic, as a disciple of Aristotle. For Longinus, who gives an almost exhaustive list of all the philosophers of his time, Ammonius and Ptolemaeus were "the most accomplished scholars of their time, Ammonius especially being unapproached in breadth of learning". Longinus was writing obviously after Ammonius had died. Among those living, Longinus rated Plotinus and Amelius as the two greatest thinkers: "Only these two seem to me worth study".<sup>6</sup>

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5. vita Plotinii, 3

6. vita Plotinii, 20

Longinus was undoubtedly the father of literary criticism, and his verdicts are balanced and based on deep perception. Longinus did not agree with Plotinus and openly says so Porphyry says Longinus did not understand Plotinus. But, for him Plotinus and his teacher Ammonius are the two most outstanding philosophers of his time.

Longinus did not regard Ammonius a Platonist; if anything, he regarded him as an Aristotelian. Ammonius was widely and deeply read in the Indian, Persian and Greek system of philosophy, as well as, no doubt, in Judaism and Christianity. What his nationality was, we have no idea. The statement that he was an Alexandrian porter is but an unfriendly jest.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the hypothesis, now no longer defended, that Ammonius was a Buddhist monk,<sup>8</sup> can be regarded as no more than a clever guess.

Whatever be the national identity of this anonymous catalyst of Mediterranean thinking, he brought with him something new, which did not exist in the Greek way of thinking. It was this that attracted Plotinus to him, and it was this that made Plotinus different and outstanding.

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7. Rene' Cadiou, La jeunesse d' Origene, Paris 1935, p. 184

8. J. Danielou, IVeme Siecle, note 59.

The circumstantial evidence is very strong for the hypothesis that what was new in Ammonius and Plotinus was this Indian element. What precisely it was, which particular tradition of India it came from and by what means, it seems now difficult to judge.

Alexandrians began travelling to India around the first century of our era. Strabo, the geographer, says that about 120 ships sailed to India every year<sup>9</sup>. The way to India overland had been opened up by Alexander, soon after founding the city of Alexandria around 331/330 BC. The "conquest" of India and the defeat of Porus took place only three or four years later - in 327 B.C.

The sea route from Red Sea ports to India was fully opened up, however, only at the beginning of our era. Clement of Alexandria (ca 150-214 A.D) refers to the followers of the Boutta<sup>10</sup>, and we know from other sources that Brahmins are present in Alexandria in the first century. All wisdom from all parts of the world converged on the Museum in Alexandria - a Greek city in Egypt, the largest Jewish city in the world (like New York today), the centre of all Christian intellectual life, mid-point of a new trade route opened between Europe and the East, richly endowed by the Ptolemies with a university and a library of first rank in the world. It was a naval base for the operations against Persia, and the inheritor of the commerce of Tyre. It linked Macedonia with the Nile valley and supplied the grain for the Roman empire.

In this great cultural, commercial and intellectual centre of the world, the role played by Indian thought and spirituality has been intentionally minimised by western scholarship. The reason must lie in a fear, which nouveau-riche nations and cultures usually have, to acknowledge their debts.

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9. See Strabo Geography : 2:5, and also BK XX

10. Stromata I:15

There are, fortunately, some exceptions in Western scholarship. One of these is Emile Brehier of the Sorbonne, at one time the leading Plotinus scholar of the western world. And this is what he said, more than 50 years ago:

"We have believed, as one can see, that one has to direct one's vision much further beyond Egypt to make intelligible the thought of Plotinus; in going up as far as India, we have imagined Alexandria, as a recent writer has done, as having seen constantly passing or dwelling a cosmopolitan cohort: the small bronzes and the miniature earthenware statues help us discern the very diverse ethnic types... Greeks, Italians, Syrians, Libyans, Cilicians, Ethiopians, Arabs, Bactrians, Scythians, Indians, Persians..... And we have also believed it was legitimate, and even necessary, to put forth, regarding the relations of Plotinus with India, a hypothesis which others more competent than us would perhaps investigate and verify"<sup>11</sup>

What is this element that is distinctively Indian in Plotinus? Clearly the idea of total union of beings with the One. Westerners speak about this as the 'mystical' element. The word "mystical" as used by westerners and by others who imitate them, is much too mystifying for me, one against which I am usually on guard. It is too quickly assimilated to the Spanish mysticism - of Teresa or of St. John of the Cross - or to the spirituality of Germany and the low countries to the north of Germany.

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11. E, Brehier, La Philosophie de Plotin, Paris, 1928. Intro: p. xviii - XIX. The recent writer cited is Victor Chapot in Le Monde Romain, Paris, 1927.



But the Indian element in Plotinus' thought, for me at least, has to be traced, to the upanishadic view of the relation between Brahman, Atman and Jagad. Brehier is right in asserting that while it is through Plotinus that hellenic ideas penetrated the west, it is important to find out whether that hellenism was already integrated with a current of a different set of ideas coming from outside hellenism<sup>12</sup>

My paper must end here, with a general request that Brehier's challenge should today be picked up by a competent scholar, possibly an Indian scholar, who can delineate the Indian element in Plotinus, see how this element penetrated western thought and created what the west today calls "mysticism" and how the whole development of Christian thought and spirituality after the 3rd century has been profoundly pervaded by this Plotinian-Indian element.

Western Christians fondly imagine that Christianity is a semitic product, i.e. when they acknowledge that it is not western in origin. They have difficulty recognizing that the Greek element was integrally interwoven with it from the beginning, in the minds of Jesus and Paul. But it would be even more difficult for them to recognize an Indian element going into the classical Christian thought of the fourth century Byzantium, via Plotinus and Ammonius Saccas. But truth should eventually come out despite such difficulties.

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12. Brehier, op cit. p. 109

# Neo-Platonism and Christian mysticism

## A Fresh Look at an Old Debate

(Paul Gregoris)

Even Bertrand Russell, who can hardly be accused of mystic leanings, calls Plotinus "the last of the great philosophers of antiquity".

In a time of turmoil and misery in the external world Plotinus (AD 204-270) turned away from that turbulent world to contemplate the eternal, the changeless the untroubled. He had lived through the most cruel persecutions of <sup>Roman Emperor</sup> Decius which began in 250 AD with the execution of Fabian, Bishop of Rome. The Goths had invaded Moesia and Pannonia, and Decius who fought them was killed in battle. Decius himself had killed his predecessor Philip the Arabian, in order to ascend the throne.

He was born in Egypt in AD 205. The Roman empire to which Egypt belonged, had become a plaything of the troops, who chose as Emperor whoever offered them more money and then proceeded to assassinate him, in order to offer the Imperial crown for sale again. Gothic Germans (Barbarians) from the North and the Persians from the East ransacked the <sup>land</sup> and devastated the cities, diminishing

the population of the empire by a third (with some help from pestilences and famines). Throughout the life of Plotinus chaos reigned in the Empire, in Egypt as in Rome. But he makes no mention of these troubles in his writings. He took the option, taken by the sages of India too in such times, to regard history as untruth, as illusion, as māya. Only by resolutely ignoring the world open to our senses do we get to that inner world of pure harmony, light and joy.

For Plotinus, as for most of our own sages, the accidents of one's birth in this world, childhood, adulthood, appearance, personality and so on are unimportant. They belong to the perishable and changing realm of reality and have no share in the unchanging truth. The question whether Plotinus' ideas had been influenced by Indian thought or not, would to him seem irrelevant. It is the truth that matters — not the words or ideas in which it is expressed.

We know that Plotinus wanted to go to India, and that he got to Mesopotamia in Roman Empire

Gordian Third's Campaign against the Persians. Porphyry's vita Plotini tells us that much.

Bertrand Russell can hardly conceal his disrespect for Porphyry - whom he calls a Semite, and to whose Asiatic mentality Russell would assign most of the "supernaturalist" elements in the Enneads. <sup>and in later Neo-platonism.</sup> For Russell Porphyry was more Pythagorean than Plotinus.

Plotinus was naturally different from Plato, as Russell fails to register, in that the things of the ~~changing~~ world like politics, virtues, individuals, etc find no treatment in Plotinus, while Plato paid much more attention to the things of this world. For Plotinus the sense-world was a take-off point, to see what lies behind the phenomena - the harmony, the beauty, the proportion, the symmetries, the principles of order.

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Plotinus is important for western civilisation, just as important, say, as Augustine. In fact Augustine was one of the agencies through which Plotinus got into the gene-pool of the west. There are at least three channels through which Plotinus radically influenced western

## Notes

1. B. Russell, A History of Western Philosophy, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1945, Eleventh Printing, p. 284
2. ibid. p. 287
3. ibid. p. 297
4. Augustine, Confessions Bk V
5. Confessions Bk VII: [ix] 13.

civilisation: through Augustine, through the Pseudo-dionysian tradition, and through many of his writings being taken as Aristotle's by thinkers in the west.

Bertrand Russell regards Plotinus as "both an end and a beginning - an end as regards the Greeks, a beginning as regards Christendom."<sup>3</sup> That sounds beautiful, but unfortunately not true. Russell knew, or at least regarded as significant, western philosophy and western Christianity. Anything that was not European, including Christianity, was inferior in quality, for Russell.

When Augustine<sup>q Hippo (354-430 AD)</sup> was converted to Christianity in 386, he had<sup>for some time</sup> ceased practising Manicheism<sup>4</sup> and was almost a Neo-platonist. On conversion, as he sought to organize his thoughts and relate them to his new-found Christianity, it was the "books of the Platonists" that helped him most<sup>5</sup>.

But the Neo-Platonist tradition had its own independent transmission in the Eastern Mediterranean - From Plotinus, through Porphyry (c. 232-303), Iamblichus (c. 250-c. 330), Eunapius of Sardis (born 346), Proclus (410-85), Chalcidius

THE URGIC NEO-PLATONISM AND THE  
EUNOMIUS-GREGORY DEBATE

The Relation of the Eunomian System to  
Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus

(Paulos Mar Gregorios)

A great deal of confusion in the contemporary understanding of Gregory of Nyssa stems from (a) wrong classification of the systems of thought prevalent in the then Middle East (that includes Athens) and (b) trying to put Gregory as well as his opponent Eunomius into one of these categories.

At an earlier stage when the German Professor Julius Rupp<sup>1</sup> dominated the field and when the background information available was seriously limited, it was fashionable to put Eunomius forward as a sort of Aristotelian Gnostic, and Gregory of Nyssa as a Nicene Platonist<sup>2</sup>. There can be little doubt about the debt of Eunomius to Aristotle and the Gnostics, or that of Gregory to Nicea and Plato. But the relationship of both to Middle Platonism and to its later development called Neo-Platonism has often been neglected in the analysis.

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1. See esp pp 132 ff in his Gregors des Bischofs von Nyssa Leben und Meinungen, Leipzig 1834

2. e.g. Cherniss - The Platonism of Gregory of Nyssa,

Berkeley, 1930

The purpose of this paper is simply to take a step towards filling out this neglected aspect.

I. The Spirit of Platonism - The Good and the True

The distinction between "Middle" Platonism and "Neo"-platonism defies definition. Some may see the element of "mysticism" or the quest for unity with the One as the distinguishing element. Many western scholars regard this "mysticism" as an "oriental" element peculiar to neo-platonism

On the other hand, there are scholars who regarded Socrates himself a mystic. A.E. Taylor, for example tells us in his commentary on Plato's Symposium, that Plato's purpose in the introduction to this work "is plainly to call our attention to a marked feature in the character of Socrates. He is at heart a mystic and there is something 'other-wordly' about him".<sup>x</sup> Socrates, from all accounts, especially that of Alcibiades in the Symposium seems to have been in the habit of going into day long 'rapt' silent sequences. Whether that makes him a 'mystic' or not, I will not venture to say.

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3. A.E. Taylor, Plato, The Man and His Work

University Paperbacks, Methuen, London, 1926/1960, p. 211.  
See also Symposium 174 ff for Aristodemus' story of Socrates getting 'lost' in contemplation.



What is important for us, however, is that the concept of eros as desire, craving, when directed towards the 'highest good', or on the way to that highest good, towards the higher good, has much in common, (for Plato's Socrates in the Symposium), with what later western mystics have come to call the "contemplative ascent". What Diotima, the Priestess of Mantinea, gives us in the Symposium, bears close resemblance to St. John of the Cross's description of the journey of the soul<sup>4</sup>. W. Hamilton in his introduction to Plato's Symposium says about the Diotima speech:

"Diotima describes it in terms borrowed from the mysteries, partly, no doubt, because it is a gradual progress comparable to the stages of an initiation, and partly because the final vision is a religious rather than an intellectual experience, and, like the culminating revelation of a mystery religion, is not to be described or communicated".<sup>5</sup>

Naturally Plato's Socrates is very discrete in reporting the secret teaching of Diotima of Mantinea. Love is the secret, love as eros, desiring after the good. But all love is not the same. Love expresses itself in several ways - mainly three: love of money or physical prowess

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4. At least A.E. Taylor sees such a resemblance; see his Plato, p. 225. Taylor also says "In Greek literature, the speech (of Diotima), I think we may fairly say, stands alone until we come to Plotinus" - ibid.

5. Plato, The Symposium, The Penguin Classics, Harmondsworth, 1951/1959. p. 24

comes at the lower end. Above that is love of wisdom. And at the highest level is love of the Supreme, totally, absolutely good.

Love is defined by Diotima as "desire for the perpetual possession of the good". As the soul, driven by eros, ascends the ladder of the mysteries of love, at the end of her ascent there is revealed to her:

"a beauty whose nature is marvellous indeed, the final goal, Socrates, of all her previous efforts. This beauty is first of all eternal; it neither comes into being nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes; next, it is not beautiful in part and ugly in part, nor beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in this relation and ugly in that ..... she will see it as absolute, existing alone with itself, unique eternal, and all other beautiful things as partaking of it, yet in such a manner that, while they come into being and pass away, it neither undergoes any increase or diminution nor suffers any change" 6

Diotima advised Socrates, according to Plato, to stay all one's life in this region of the "contemplation of absolute beauty".

But this contemplation is by no means a purely intellectual one. Besides being ardent and passionate, it entails a discipline, a secret discipline of training the eros to desire the absolute good. On this secret discipline, Socrates barely makes mention, in one tantalising sentence:

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6. Plato, The Symposium E.T. cited. pp 93-94

"I declare that it is the duty of every <sup>man</sup> ~~man~~ to honour love, and I honour and practice the mysteries of love in an especial degree myself, and recommend the same to others" 7

Socrates learned these "practices of the mysteries love" from Diotima the priestess, whose religious offices and sacrifices, according to Socrates (and Plato), postponed the plague from hitting Athens for ten years. 8

Socrates was no intellectual, no rhetorician or academic, like Lycon his accuser or Gorgias or Hippias, or Evenus the Parian, or like a modern university professor. Socrates was of course a great questioner, an exposé of contradictions, a ridiculer of facetious arguments, a logician of the first waters when he wanted to be. But the secret of his life was his "practice of the mysteries of love", the muse or divinity upon whom he depended for guidance, as he told the Athenians in his famous Apologia:

"You have heard me speak at some times and in some places of a divine element or daemon which comes to me (moi theion ai kai daimonion gignetai). For me this began from my childhood. It is a voice which comes to me, always turning me away from what I am going to do, but never telling me what to do". 9

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7. ibid. p. 95

8. ibid. p. 79

9. Plato: Apologia Sokratous, 31.C. Eng Tr present author's.

'Mysticism' in Greece did not start with Plotinus, nor is it an oriental element. Socrates' capacity to perceive truth, to expose contradictions and to ridicule sham and pretension, came from an "inner life" of the "mysteries of love", of worship, of what came to be called in our hopelessly academic language "theurgic mysticism of the later neo-platonists".

Socrates was a poet of the good, a "poietes of arete, a procreator or creator of the good. And for Plato, this is central - not the doctrines about hyle and idea. Plato's ideal, ascribed to Socrates, is to bring forth, or to beget the good, to ~~nurture~~ and train the good; that is the true desire of all souls.

But our mis-understanding of both Plato and Socrates comes from our academic malformation. The manifest technique which Plato and Socrates used was dialogue and dialectical or Socratic questioning. But we see today how despicably poor mere logical analysis can be in promoting virtue, compared to the Socratic analysis. The difference between the two is that logical analysis presupposes and demands only linguistic consistency as the quality of truth, whereas in the Socratic analysis, there is a prior perception of truth which comes from the "practice of the mysteries of love" and not merely from the requirements of logic.

It is this practice of the mysteries of love by participation (metousia) in the ariste psuche of God that both Plato and Socrates advocated. It is the vision of truth, of which one is usually always largely silent, that informs the philosophy of Plato and Socrates, not logic, nor pure thinking. That vision is always born of a discipline of worship.

When Plato draws attention to the "standing rapture" of Socrates for a whole day and night, he is pointing to the true secret of all genuine wisdom - the participation, beyond all discursive rationality, in the absolute good.

Not all that Plato taught is in his extant or extinct writings. The Academy inherited this unwritten teaching (agrapha dogmata)<sup>10</sup> of Plato, and embodied it, not just in its class-room exposition, but in the disciplined practice of the mysteries of love in the academy. How few professors recognize today, that the black academic gown which comes from Plato's academy, is a symbol of the renunciation of all worldly ambition, of the love of money and power, of popularity and affluence, of comfort and middle class living, of tenure and promotion, of reviewers' acclaim and best-seller markets'.

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10. Aristotle frequently refers to these agrapha dogmata of the Academy.

The Good was more at the heart of the Academy than the True in an intellectual sense. In fact the Good alone was absolutely true. The disciplined pursuit of the Good, rather than satisfactory intellectual explanations of reality as it is, constituted the central thrust of the Academy, in the days of Plato as in the days of his successors.

Of course the discourses in the Academy went to fine points of logic whether the geometrical point was a fiction of the geometers or the starting point of a line, the beginning of a flow rather than a minimum of static volume. These discourses were necessary for the shaping of the mind to perceive reality. The central concern, however, was what Plato put in the mouth of Socrates' and his priestess-guru, Diotima, not the discussions about forms or ideas. To know the truth is to choose the good. And to choose the good is to pursue the good through a disciplined life.

Even when academicians succumbed to the temptation of giving priority to intellectual knowledge over the quality of being, the Academy never completely separated the True from the Good and the Adorable. The main concern of the Academy was to grow wings for the soul. "The divine is beauty, wisdom, goodness and the like; and by these the wing of the soul is nourished, and grows apace; but when fed upon evil and foulness and the opposite of good, wastes and falls away". <sup>11</sup>

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11. Phaedrus: E.T. Irvin Edman, (ed) The Works of Plato, Modern Library, New York, 1928, p. 287.

## II. A Basically Religious Neo-Platonism and Eunomius

The Platonic tradition of the Academy which had assimilated a great deal from Pythagoreanism, had to undergo the severe critique of Aristotle and the <sup>Stoics</sup> ~~stories~~, as well as that of the Skeptics. By the time we came to Plotinus (205 - 270 AD), Porphyry (233 - 303 AD), and Iamblichus (Ca 250 - Ca 330 AD), the Mediterranean world has seen so many religious, philosophical currents. Christianity itself became highly philosophical and dialectically related to Plato already with Origen (Ca 185 - Ca 254), and before that in Philo (Ca 20 BC - Ca 50 AD) Judaism had also sought to assimilate and re-interpret Plato.

It is within this revised and revived Platonism that the debate between Eunomius of <sup>Cyzicus</sup> ~~byzicus~~ (died Ca 395) and Gregory of Nyssa (Ca 330 - Ca 395) takes place. That debate is not easy to comprehend without some grasp of the main concerns and issues of that milieu, and some awareness of the three often over-lapping traditions, neo-Pythagorean, neo-Platonic and neo-Christian.

The most important point I want to make in this paper is that these three were not academic traditions, not even philosophical traditions, but 'spiritual' traditions or ways of life. They were traditions which shaped the lives of individuals and communities - neo-pythagorean communities, Neo-Platonic communities and Christian communities.

Bertrand Russell thinks that Porphyry, the Syrian disciple of Plotinus and his biographer, was more Pythagorean than Platonic <sup>12</sup>. Russell, a late rationalist, thinks in the out-moded and anachronistic categories of 'natural' and 'supernatural' and thinks Porphyry was more 'supernaturalist' than Plotinus, and blames Porphyry for making neo-platonism religions. For Lord Russell, Plotinus himself made a mistake in selecting what was of importance in Plato. Plotinus has little to say about Plato's political interests, definitions of particular virtues, and the pleasures of mathematics, which are more congenial to Lord Russell. Plotinus errs, according to Russell, in taking Plato's "theory of ideas, the mystical doctrines of the Phaedo and Book VI of the Republic, and the discussion of love in the Symposium" as making up almost the whole of Plato.

Russell's summary of Plotinus' ideas shows clearly how difficult it is for a modern rationalist or for an academic philosopher to come to terms with Plotinus for whom philosophy is the expression of a transformed being.

The Enneads of Plotinus are at best Porphyry's transcriptions of discourses by Plotinus, put together without too much logic. We must not forget the fact that Plotinus was not a Greek, not a westerner, but an Egyptian, and his scribe Porphyry (Malchus) a Syrian, as was the latter's disciple Iamblichus.

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12. Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1945, p. 287.



Porphiry was perhaps an ex-Christian<sup>13</sup> and certainly an anti-Christian, the author of 15 books Against the Christians. A native of Tyre, he met Plotinus in 262 A.D., and during the eight years preceding the latter's death in 270<sup>6</sup> A.D., took down notes from lectures and interviews. It is only through Porphyry's syrian mind that we have access to the Egyptian mind of Plotinus. And unless our own minds develop something in common with the Egyptian and Syrian minds, we are likely to misunderstand Plotinus as Russell did, and therefore to mis-understand Eunomius.

For example, Porphyry's Peri Tes Ek Logion Philosophias was an exposition of the Greek Oracles which so influenced all writers and thinkers of this period. Augustine <sup>14</sup> calls the book Theologia Philosophias, and quotes from it, mixing admiration and criticism. But he cites also Porphyry's comment on the Apollonian oracle about Christ, that the Jews have a better understanding of God than the Christians have. The Oracles are clearly an anti-Christian, but probably pro-Jewish, pagan work. The pagan gods and goddesses, Apollo and Hecate condemn Orthodox Christians as deluded, while Hecate at least praises Christ himself as a noble soul.

One has to see Porphyry's perspective as essentially akin to much modern liberal Christianity, in which the dogmas about Christ's divinity and pre-existence are regarded at best as delusions or superstitious<sup>n</sup> - i.e., absurd beliefs  
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13. Socrates, Hist., Eccl.

14. Augustine, The City of God Bk XIX, ch<sup>y</sup>. xxiii

which have survived into a rational age. There is no difficulty in thinking that the Arian bishop of <sup>C</sup>yzicus was of the same school. Eunomius was an academic philosopher-theologian, who accepted the "theurgic mysticism" of the pagan philosophers of his time as the standard of truth, and tried to fit his Christian belief into that framework - a framework equally acceptable to Jews as to cultivated pagans.

For Porphyry as for Plotinus, life is a sort of preparation for death and for the <sup>life</sup> beyond death. Philosophy for them means the practice of virtue rather than the quest for knowledge as such. For both Plotinus and Porphyry, truth and the good are one; doctrine leads to practice; discipline leads to true illumination. Porphyry's early work on the oracles seems a full systematisation of Pythagorean teaching and practice.

In the Enneads the theurgic practices of Plotinus are not made explicit. So western scholarship finds him more attractive, and regards him as a pure philosopher, without the taint of religion. But the theurgy that Porphyry writes about is <sup>S</sup> but an embellishment of the sacrificial-cultic practices of Neo-Pythagoreanism, which Plotinus himself practised.

What Porphyry seems to have done in his later works like "On the Images of God" (Peri Agalmatōn)<sup>15</sup> is to make the worship part of Pythagoreanism more explicit and more philosophically justified. Peri Agalmatōn was probably written before Porphyry became a disciple of Plotinus. Here the idea of God has become more refined, the disdain for Pythagorean

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15. We have a few fragments of Peri Agalmatōn in Eusebius Præparatio Evangelica BK.III. chs. vii, ix, xi, xii, xiii

'magical' rites more explicit, a greater confidence evident in the power of reason.

Porphyrus seems to have moved from neo-Pythagoreanism to Neoplatonism, after he had left Christianity (if ever he was a Christian). Ammonius Saccas probably influenced him in his younger days, but it was after a bout of Neo-Pythagoreanism that Porphyry came back to Plotinian neo-platonism.

Plotinus was the teacher of the aristocracy. His main pupils were professionals like the medical doctors Eustochius and Paulinus, bankers like Serapion, Senators like Orontius, Sabinillus and Rogatian.<sup>16</sup> The teaching of Plotinus was never intended for the masses. Its attraction was for the upper and middle classes, among whom the religiously inclined had only disdain for Christianity. Before Plotinus came on the scene, the upper and middle classes oscillated between various forms of Platonism and Pythagoreanism or Gnosticism adopted for their needs. During the second century, what we today call "Middle Platonism", but which in fact was a religiously oriented re-interpretation of Pythagoras and Plato, had already become prevalent among the aristocracy. Plutarch and Gaius, Albinus and Apuleius, as well as Atticus, taught a Plato who was able to satisfy the religious needs of the cultured. Plato for these people became the theoretician of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul, a legislator for the true and refined religious life. It is this religious Plato who had become acceptable to Philo who had become acceptable to Philo the Jew earlier.

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Plutarch (died ca 120 A.D.) above all had lifted up the Concept of the One, <sup>hen</sup> to hen, as the ultimate reality, as distinct from the multiple or polla. To hen was to on. Hen einai dei to on. Being had to be One. It is this plutarchian reconciliation of hen and on that Plotinus picked up and made central to his thought <sup>17</sup>.

But the concept of the One who is transcendent and beyond ~~at~~ all multiple reality was a common concept in the first and second century Mediterranean culture among the philosophically inclined. One sees it in any Platonist, including Philo of Alexandria. This One is so transcendent, that the world of the many can have contact with him only through an intermediary like Philo's <sup>L</sup> Logos or Plotinus' Nous. The intellectual transcendence of God, which the Jewish and Christian Fathers called the "incomprehensibility of God", was also common coin among the pagan intellectuals. To get to the One, one has to shed the dragging weight of matter and the multiple. When finally the contact is made, it is not the reasoning mind that sees; it is a new eye opened in the heart; a sudden opening of the soul's eye, as if waking from a dream <sup>18</sup>, that sees the light.

But it was Plutarch again who put the nous above the <sup>P</sup> Psyche. Since the One is pure intelligible, the psyche or soul has to rise above both body and soul, to the nous which is far superior to the soul. For Plutarch if the body is the earth, while the soul is like the moon, only the nous is bright and superior, like the Sun <sup>19</sup>.

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17. Plutarch : De Ei ~~et~~ <sup>apud</sup> Delphos : XX

18. Philo de Abrahamo : 15

19. Plutarch, de Iside et Osiride : L XXVII

Albinus, a disciple of Gaius whom Plotinus read, along with Apuleius, a fellow-disciple of Gaius, had paved the way for Plotinus' final integration with the neo-platonist Trinity of the three hypostases - the One, the nous, and the psuche.

Albinus' three hypostases were:

- (a) the first God, who is the first Good, the hyperouranios Theos, the primary Intellect
- (b) the second Intellect, the ouranios nous, the world soul, the Platonic Kosmos noetos
- (c) The Soul <sup>20</sup>

This is not to say that Plotinus simply systematized Gaius, Albinus and Apuleius. We mean to suggest that the idea of a Platonic Trinity of three hypostases was already current in the literature which Plotinus read and to which Eunomius had access. The Platonic Trinity was the most respectable doctrine in the 4th Century Mediterranean. Eunomius, rather uncritically, accepted it, and accommodated it to his Anomoian faith.

Our main point, however, is to draw attention to the basically religious orientation of Middle Platonism, as well as of Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus. All Platonic philosophy was an attempt to counter-act the pressures of the carnal, material body, a lūsis kai periagōgē psuchēs apo sōmatos, a separation of the soul from the body, for homoiōsis Theōi kata to dunaton, for a resemblance or configuration to God according to capacity. This is so in Plutarch and Apuleius as in the less religious Albinus.

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20. See R. Arnould, Platonisme in Dict. Theol Cath Vol.12 p 2272 ff.

We often forget that Numenius,<sup>21</sup> Plotinus and Porphyry were all disciples of both Plato and Pythagoras. The two basic options available outside Christianity and Judaism for second or third century seekers were neo-Pythagoreanism and Gnosticism.

Peripateticism of the Aristotelian school, and Stoicism in their various versions, as well as Epicureanism had lost their organisational strength. Aristotle and the Stoics deeply influenced Plotinus as well as Eunomius. But Neo-Pythagoreanism and Gnosticism were clearly demarcated doctrines of specially organized groups, with their own cults and religious practices.

Neo-Platonism is basically anti-Gnostic and pro-Pythagorean. Pythagoras was more akin to Plato than the wild speculations of Gnosticism. Plotinus, Porphyry tells us, wrote a treatise Against the Gnostics<sup>22</sup>. These seem to have been Christian Gnostics, who were organized in some sort of "house-churches", and thrived on many books of "revelation". "Plotinus frequently attacked their position at his conferences", Porphyry tells us.

Every attack on Gnosticism by these Platonists was a support, not so much for Orthodox Christianity, as for other pagan groups whose religion was an amalgam of Plato, Pythagoras and the mystery-cults.

"Plotinus, it would seem, set the principles of Pythagoras and of Plato in a clearer light than anyone before him",<sup>23</sup> says Longinus (213 - 273 A.D.), friend and contemporary of both Plotinus and Porphyry. Porphyry himself repeats that Plotinus followed Plato and Pythagoras.

Porphyry also tells us that Plotinus, by following the ways of meditation and discipline, became "God-like and lifting himself often, ... to the first and all-transcendent God"; and God appeared to him. The supreme end of Plotinus' life was to -----

21. Our access to Numenius is basically through fragments conserved by Proclus or Eusebius.

22. Vita Plotinii: 16, E.T. Stephen Mackenna, Plotinus, The Enneads, 4th Edn. London, 1969, p. 11.

23. Cited by Porphyry, Vita Plotinii: 20, E.T. op. cit. pp.14-15.

become one with the One, and according to Porphyry "four times, during the period I passed with him, he attained this end, by no mere natural fitness, but by the ineffable Act" 24.

Plotinus was a "theurgist", one who sought and served the transcendent God, and was often protected from error by God.

It is this neo-Pythagorean, neo-Platonist, theurgic, religious philosophy that Porphyry and Iamblichus set forth more clearly, and which was the secret religion and faith of Eunomius, the Arian bishop of Cyzicus. The goal of Middle Platonist philosophy was the direct vision of God and the configuration (homoiosis) to God that would result. Justin Martyr tells us that he took to the study of Plato for that purpose. So did <sup>C</sup>lement of Alexandria and Origen possibly, as well as the later fathers of the Church. And why not, perhaps Eunomius too?

Whatever Plotinus taught, we know mainly through Porphyry's neo-Pythagorean arrangement of that material into six groups (enneads) of 9 chapters each. The numbers six and nine have <sup>to</sup> be traced to neo-Pythagoreanism than to Plotinus himself. But neither Plotinus nor Porphyry or Iamblichus was free from neo-Pythagorean influence. This influence can be seen in later writers like Proclus and the Pseudo-Areopagite, with his nine choirs of angels in the Celestial Hierarchy.

The main difference between the pagan neo-Platonist neo-Pythagoreans and the Christian ones were three:

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24. ibid : 23

Pagan  
Neo-Platonist - Neo-Pythagorean

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(1) The transcendent One is totally One, beyond all duality or multiplicity, there are three initial hypostases, the One, the Nous and the Psuche, but the One does not admit any plurality; the Nous, however is Being, <sup>i.e.</sup> One-Many, and the World-Soul beings, <sup>i.e.</sup> one-and-many, as Plato's Parmenides said.

(2) The One engenders the Nous by emanation, as the operation (energeia) of the One. The Nous in turn engenders the Psuche by its operation (Emanation). And the Psuche engenders the world of multiplicity by its operation.

Orthodox Christian (Nicean)  
(influenced by Neo-Pythagoreanism  
and Neo-Platonism)

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(1) The transcendent One is both One and Three. This Triune One is beyond all multiplicity. The world of multiplicity can provide no analogy for understanding the three in one. There is no room for <sup>n</sup>Number or <sup>q</sup>Quantity in the Three-in-One, which is infinite.

(2) The Three-in-One creates the world of multiplicity by a process (creation) quite different from the eternal generation of the Second Hypostasis from the First. The Third Hypostasis is not generated by the Second, but <sup>O</sup>preceeds from the First. And the Three-in-One by their joint operation, creates the world of multiplicity out of nothing. And time begins with creation, not before it.



Neo-Platonist - Neo-Pythagorean

(3) In a human person, the reality is the soul, which is eternal, immortal, and of the same genus as the three initial hypostases (One, Nous and World-soul). The Body is a drag and the human soul has to be freed from it, to be alienated from it and to rise towards the One, by disciplined effort. The Soul is free and it is in its nature to make this effort and to rise towards the one, by turning inward, ignoring the world of things, towards the Centre of our being, and through that centre to the centre of all centres, to be merged and become one with that centre, beyond Being.

Orthodox Christian (Nicean)

(3) In a human person, body and soul are both real, both created together by the Tri-une God, in God's image. This image is reflected in the body and the soul. When the soul separates itself from evil, and is surrendered to its creator, it is able to bring the body under control and to use it for creativity of the good. This separation from evil and surrender to God is a Synergistic act, where the soul, in its freedom is helped by God. The soul is ~~bound~~ bound, in prison, and has to be liberated by God; but the liberation as well as the rising towards God and the free creativity of the <sup>good</sup> God are synergistic acts in which the human being and God act together. The rising in the good is infinite. There is no Term or Final End, but an eternal rising in joy towards the Three-in-One, in the infinite Three-in-One.

Christians affirmed the unity of the Transcendent One just as strongly as the Arians and the Neo-Pythagorean Neo-Platonists. Both Gregory Nazianzen and Gregory of Nyssa strongly affirm the principle "Not Three Gods". Nazianzen's fifth theological oration and Nyssa's sermon on "Not Three Gods" leave us in no doubt on this.

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But Eunomius does not belong to this world of Nicene Orthodoxy. He belongs intellectually to the Neo-Pythagorean Neo-Platonist world, with its theurgy.

Plotinus said nothing of any cultic discipline -- at least nothing explicit. He is silent, even in Porphyry's version, about any mystical experience or religious rite. The ascent to the One is described in metaphors - rising, responding to voices from on high, becoming present to the Supreme One, moving from the external to the internal, seeing the light, going beyond oneself, polishing the statue, cutting away everything, return to one's origins, return to one's fatherland.

Elevation, introversion, return and vision leading to union - there is for this obviously a method, a technique, a training (Ennead I speaks of a Proficient, a trainee for the Final End); this training is not to add something, but to take something away, something that hinders the ascent of the soul. Ennead I:6:6 speaks about purification through moral discipline, courage and every virtue. In this sixth tractate of the First Ennead, Plotinus speaks about approaching the Holy Celebrations of the Mysteries (I:6:7).

In Plotinus' school, feasts were kept e.g., Plato's feast (vita Plotinii 15); papers were read, debates were held (vit. Plot. 18). None of the accounts however mention any religious rites. This is, however, no reason to think that

Plotinus was an academic. He was certainly an ascetic, one who fasted and brought his body under subjection, in order to be free from its demand. But of this discipline, the Enneads tell us little.

Porphyry wrote a Life of Pythagoras and a work On Abstaining from Meat. There is little doubt that Porphyry the Syrian practised some Pythagorean disciplines of fasting and abstentions. If Porphyry also took part in mystery cults, he would naturally refrain from disclosing them in his writings, because such secrecy is required by the mystery cults. Porphyry died at the beginning of the 4th century. Eunomius may have known him through his writings only.

Iamblichus who died around 330 was also personally unknown to Eunomius, who went to Alexandria around 350 A.D. to study under <sup>e</sup>Actius. <sup>e</sup>Actius who was from Antioch on the other hand, probably knew Iamblichus, who was just as much Pythagorean as Plotinian, and wrote an Introduction to the Doctrines of Pythagoras. In fact Iamblichus considered himself a Pythagorean. Aedesius who established the school in Syria was also a Pythagorean and a disciple of Iamblichus.

Both Porphyry and Iamblichus belonged to the theurgic school of Neo-pythagorean Neo-platonism, to which <sup>e</sup>Proclus gave fuller expression in the second half of the 5th Century. Philosophy is a hierophant of the universe - <sup>e</sup>Proclus stated, and has to express this in worship. This concept is conceivable of Christian origin but has its roots also in the Pythagorean

and Socratic traditions which ante-date Christianity. The Eucharist was a sacrifice on behalf of the whole of humanity and the whole of creation, as the texts of some liturgies remind us.

The Theurgy of the Neo-pythagorean Neo-Platonists ~~have~~ <sup>has</sup> often been interpreted as the result of an impact of the Oriental religions. But it is just as legitimate to conceive it as the influence of a successful Christian practice of the Eucharist which the pagans imitated. Any pagan could see that the Eucharist was the source of cohesion and strength for the Christians. The pagans, out of a background of the mystery religions and Pythagorean practices, developed forms of worship which we now call "theurgy". Even Julian the Apostate, in re-opening pagan temples, had in mind the formation of a pagan theurgy which would function like the Christian eucharistic liturgy.

Theurgy was the technique accessible to the common people, especially for Egyptians and Syrians, to raise their souls towards the One. Iamblichus it was, perhaps more than others, who worked out the role of symbols and symbolic actions in raising the soul towards the One. For Plotinus, the three first hypostases could also be named Ouranos (Bachus), Chronos (Saturn) and Zeus (Jupiter). He saw no conflict between his system and the people's religion properly interpreted. But all "things" had to be dialectically used for mounting upward.

Theurgy stayed theoretically in this framework of using things as symbols for ascending towards the One. In practice however the domonic powers ~~were~~ sought after and acquired. Eunomius was less of a symbolist than his contemporary neo-Platonists.

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Aëtius, Eunomius and the Trinity

Neo-pythagorean, neo-platonic, theurgy, refurbished by replacing the dialectic reason of Plato with the non-contradiction logic of Aristotle, explains Aëtius, and to a large extent, Eunomius.

Aëtius was a Coelesyrian, who studied Aristotle's logic under a Peripatetician in Alexandria, and also studied Arian theology in Antioch. For him the Aristotelian syllogism alone gave a firm grasp of truth.

Aëtius wandered between Alexandria and Antioch, became exposed also to Neo-pythagorean, Neo-platonic theurgy, but concentrated, under George of Cappadocia, on Arius and Aristotle. Eunomius is his disciple, less Aristotelian, more sophist, but deeply immersed in the Neo-pythagorean Neo-platonic theurgy. Eunomius learned from Aëtius what the latter put down in his work: Theology or the Art of Sophistication. And he uses the technologìa (i.e., technique of using discourse) fully in agreement with the principles of the Second Sophistique.

The passage cited by Gregory of Nyssa in Contra Eunomium I (PG 45: 297 A) is a clear exposition of the Trinitarian lore of the Neo-Pythagorean Neo-Platonic Theurgy that we have been speaking about: "Here is a summary of our whole teaching:

"From the highest and Supreme-most Being, and from this, through it, after it, but before all else, a second Being. And a <sup>third</sup> ~~kind~~, but in no way to be put on the same level as the two

others, but subordinated to the One as its cause (aitia) and to the second as its birth-giving operation (energeia)".

This is clearly the Trinity of the initial hypostases of Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichus.

The three Beings or ousiai, have each its own operation (energeia) which follows (parepomenōn) it, and the names coming into being with the operation.

Eunomius insists, with the clarity of Aristotle's logic of non-contradiction, that each ousia has its separate energeia, and the energeiai of the three are different from each other, just as the hypostases, each of which is single and identical only with itself, give birth to different energeiai or operations. These operations we can study, and from these operations we can understand the ousia which produced them.

Nyssa pricks a hole in Eunomius' logic at the outset. If the names of the three Beings come into being along with their energeiai, as Eunomius insists, why doesn't he mention these names, namely Father, Son and Holy Spirit? Why does Eunomius suppress these names and use <sup>locations</sup> ~~circumlocutions~~ like "anōtate kai kuriōtate ousia" instead of Father, and more complicated phrases for the Son and the Holy Spirit?

Nyssa regards Eunomius as a crypto-pagan, determined to undermine the faith of the church from within (PG.45:300C). More explicitly, Nyssa accuses Eunomius of advocating the Jewish doctrine of God (Ioudaikos dogma: 304 D), attributing Godhead only to the Father.

Nyssa's argument about being and existence can easily escape us. For him ousia, i.e., being or is-ness, does not permit degrees. "By what sophia (wisdom or sophistry) does he distinguish between more and less in being?" (To mallon te kai <sup>h</sup>ētton tēs ousias). There cannot be more being and less being, because being is a simple predicate. This is particularly so for the Divine Being, for Gregory. There is no quantity of more or less in the infinite being.

Neither is there sub-ordination or ~~super~~-ordination in the divine nature. Subjection or sub-ordination is only for the creation. If the Son is subject to the Father in Christian faith, it is only the Son as part of creation, not as Creator.

Nyssa's radical refutation of Eunomius does not come from any logical demonstration, though he exposes the logical untenability of many of Eunomius' arguments. The dispute is not between two philosophers and cannot be settled by the arbitration of a third philosopher. The controversy is between two group convictions - that of the Church and that of the Anomoeans -

"So then the whole fight and world-battle between the Church people (ekklesiastikoi) and the Anomoians (anomoi), is about whether the Son and the Holy Spirit are created natures as they say or whether they are uncreated (aktistos & ~~h~~useis) natures as the Church has believed" (45:317A).

Clearly both sides are unable to demonstrate logically the createdness or the uncreatedness. Eunomius affirms that there are three initial hypostases or beings, following the neo-Pythagorean neo-Platonist theurgic school to which he



really and secretly belongs, while serving as Arian bishop of Cyzicus. Gregory of Nyssa affirms that there is only one uncreated Being:

"The Church's teaching is not to divide the faith among many beings (Plēthos ousiōn), but in three personae (prosōpois) and hypostases (hypostasesi), never different in being is-ness (einai), while our opponents posit variety and difference among the beings" (45 : 320D)

Simplicity and infinitude - (aploun kai apeiron) - that is the divine nature. And if all the first three hypostases are simple and infinite, then one simple and infinite cannot be greater or lesser than another (45:321D). Eunomius obviously regarded the three initial hypostases as simple, but whether he regarded the second and the third as infinite is doubtful. In fact even the simplicity is less perfect as one comes down the scale of Eunomius' three initial hypostases. The Father seems to be more perfectly simple than the Son and the Holy Spirit in whom there seems to be some admixture of compoundness.

Nyssa's final clinching of the argument comes from a direct statement of the faith of the Church, which we summarize thus: (45:333 B-D).

Being can be ultimately divided into intelligible and sensible (to noēton kai to aisthēton); the intelligible world can be divided again into uncreate and created (aktistos kai ktistē). Larger and smaller exist only in the sensible part of the created world, i.e., where there is size and extension. Even in the intelligible part of creation, greater and less would have to be measured by

other than size or extension.

The source-spring of all Good (pantos agathou pēgē), the beginning (archē), the treasure-house (chorēgia), is seen as in the Uncreated Nature. The whole created order is inclined (neneuken) towards this, and subsists by sharing in the First Good of the Supreme Nature, in contact with it and participating in it, by necessity in proportion to the varying (some more, some less) measure of freedom of will each has (kata to autexovsion tes proaireseōs metalambanontōn). It is the share of this freedom of the will and Consequent participation of less and more in the First Good, that becomes the measure of greater and lesser in the created intelligible world. Created intelligible nature stands on the frontier (methorios) between good and evil, capable of either. Degree is then decided by greater removal from evil and further advance in the Good.

But these distinctions have no place in the Uncreated Intelligible Nature. It does not come to the good by acquisition, nor participates in it by measure. It is itself the fullness of good and the source of good. Any distinction within the Uncreated is not in terms of more and less - not of quantity of good, but only by virtue of the uniqueness of the Three Persons. The three persons are all uncreated, infinite, fullness of good in each.

*That is a summary of Gregory's teaching, based on The Church's faith.* Nyssa then goes on to refute Eunomius' argument that the Father is 'prior' or 'Senior' to the Son, being more ancient,

and therefore worthy of greater honour. This of course was the key argument of all Arians: that there was a then when the Son~~s~~ was not; that the Father has first to exist before the Son can be begotten; therefore that there is a time-interval (diastēma) between the Father and the Son.

Nyssa's argument is clear. First, the universal statement ~~that~~ time belongs to the created order and that there is no time-interval in the Uncreate (45:357 Bff). Second, attributing time-interval within the Creator introduces a logical anomaly. If the Son began at a particular point in time, and if the Father existed for a fixed (finite) period of time before that, the finite age of the Son plus the finite period of the Father's existence before that would give the finite age of the Father, since the sum of two finite numbers has to be finite. This would make the Infinite God finite, which is absurd (45:360 Aff).

#### CONCLUSION

The debate between Gregory of Nyssa and Eunomius, part of which is reflected in Contra Eunomium I, cannot be understood as between a Nicene Platonist and an Aristotelian Gnostic. Gregory of Nyssa of course speaks out of Nicene Orthodoxy, and uses the technologia of the Second Sophistique, just as much as his opponent. But Nyssa has learned all he can from the Neo-Pythagorean Neo-Platonist system of searching for unity with the One through worship. Nyssa has, however, sifted the prevailing system of pagan philosophy through a religious-dogmatic sieve - the faith in the Triune God and in the historical

Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity. For Gregory, the faith of the Church was the standard by which all outside knowledge was to be tested and sifted, though in that testing and sifting, or rather after that testing and sifting, the technology of outside logic could be used to the hilt. It is not that logic that yields the truth. But once the truth is firmly grasped on the basis of faith, logic can be fully used to refute error.

Eunomius on the other hand, is no Aristotelian Gnostic. Most likely he agreed with Plotinus and the neo-Platonists as well as <sup>with</sup> neo-Pythagoreans, in being anti-Gnostic. No <sup>doubt</sup> ~~about~~ Eunomius has much more confidence in the non-contradiction logic of the Aristotelian Syllogism than in the dialectical Socratic logic of Plato. Eunomius' basic effort, however, is to bring the faith of the Church in line with prevailing outside philosophy. He probably hoped, like many today who advocate indigenisation or secularisation of the faith, thereby to win pagans and Jews for the Christian faith. The Cappadocians were the main obstacles in the way. Hence the fury of his personal attack on Basil, which according to Gregory, caused Basil's death. Gregory perhaps because of this belief of his, has also been unsparing in his personal attacks on Eunomius.

History has given the verdict in favour of the Cappadocians. But the basic problem is still with us. Do we, like Eunomius, seek <sup>b</sup> to bring the faith to fit the categories of outside knowledge, or can we use the insights of the faith to question some of the assumptions of prevailing outside

philosophy? Once these assumptions are seen to be wrong in the light of the faith, even today it is possible to use the techniques of outside logic to demonstrate the self-contradiction in these assumptions.

But this latter course then demands the unusual combination of outside philosophy and science on the one hand, of profound and detailed knowledge, and also a deep and firm rootage in the perennial faith of the Church on the other.

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